Part II

SLAVERY

Slave scarred by whipping. (CORBIS)

Chapter Two

Creating A Biracial Society, 1619-1720

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From the time the first Africans stepped onto Virginia's shore, the English mainland colonies moved toward a biracial society, one in which people from Africa and their descendants — including those of mixed African and European heritage — held a subordinate legal, social, and economic status. This caste system originated in three distinct circumstances: the demand for workers especially on southern plantations; the availability of human beings for sale by means of the Atlantic slave trade; and the cultural predisposition of the English to regard darker skinned people as inferior, hence suitable for enslavement. In the English colonies, this racial hierarchy was first articulated to its fullest in the West Indies, particularly in Barbados, which served as a model for the mainland plantation colonies in the Chesapeake and South Carolina. New England and the Middle Atlantic region, though less entrenched in slave ownership than the southern provinces, also profited from the labor of enslaved Africans and erected a hierarchical social framework based on notions of race.

The origins of black bondage in English America can be found primarily in the need for laborers to plant, cultivate, harvest, and process highly profitable staple crops. Without this demand for labor and the capital to purchase Africans, slavery would have remained a marginal institution. But also important were the power English colonists had to keep other humans enslaved and their willingness to use that power. Africans arrived in chains, far from their homelands and usually isolated from people they had known. They were sold quickly, becoming subject to the owner's authority and restrictive colonial laws. The fact that slaves were defined as property gave masters wide powers under the English common law, even without specific statutes establishing and governing the institution. The inclination of English men and women to exploit Africans as slaves came from ethnocentrism, hierarchical beliefs, and prejudice against blackness, all leading to the idea that Africans were an inferior, unchristian people who could be held as property. To justify keeping Africans as slaves, English colonists used color of skin more than any other attribute such as religion or customs.

The English used the same rationale for enslaving Native Americans, whom they also considered a debased, heathen race. Some colonizers expected to exploit the indigenous people of America as had the Spanish, but high mortality among Indians, the opportunity to escape when held as slaves in the vicinity of their homes, and the colonists' military weakness prevented large-scale enslavement of Native Americans. When the English had the opportunity to enslave Indians, they displayed few qualms about the practice. New Englanders sold prisoners of war to the West Indies and elsewhere after the Pequot massacre and Metacom's War. South Carolinians stimulated a brisk slave trade with southern Indians who captured members

of competing tribes. The Carolina merchants found a market for the enslaved Indians in the Caribbean.

During the period before 1660, the English founded colonies successfully in three regions of the New World: the West Indies, the Chesapeake, and New England. Slavery existed in each of these areas but with differences that underscored the importance of economic factors in fostering its growth. In Barbados, planters moved rapidly into the business of making sugar in the 1640s. Two decades later, enslaved Africans comprised 90 percent of the island's labor force. The Chesapeake colonies of Virginia and Maryland created a plantation society based on tobacco, but until after 1680 white indentured servants remained the principal source of labor. In New England, where family farms, fishing, and shipping constituted the basis of the economy, slavery never became dominant, despite the fact that Massachusetts was the first English colony to provide a written rationalization for human bondage.

Though not the first permanent English colony in the New World, Barbados predated others in adopting slavery as its primary source of labor. The island's development influenced other English colonies in the Caribbean — the Leewards and Jamaica — and in British North America as well. In 1627, the English settled the lush island 21 miles long by 14 miles wide; for about a decade it drew young male indentured servants with the promise of ten acres of land as freedom dues. When all of the arable land on the tiny island had been distributed by 1638, Barbados became a much less attractive destination for English people. During these early years, settlers lacked a highly marketable crop. They tried tobacco and cotton, but produced only a poor grade. Some planters also grew and refined sugar during the 1630s, but it was not until after 1640 that the sugar economy moved into full swing. The Dutch assisted the conversion by offering to market the sugar in Amsterdam at high prices. The Dutch could interlope in the English colonies at this time because the English government was disrupted by civil war. Crucially, Dutch slave traders promised to sell enslaved Africans to the Barbados planters, who needed large numbers of workers to produce sugar and expected few voluntary bondsmen from England. Sugar was highly labor intensive, requiring about one worker per acre of cane. It also required significant capital. Once the success of sugar became known, wealthy English investors bought up land from ordinary Barbados farmers, acquired expensive machinery for processing the cane, and purchased hundreds of Africans. Barbados developed on a capitalist model, as a place to make money rather than as a community in which to raise a family. Africans faced severe exploitation by planters who thought it cheaper to replace people who died from overwork and inadequate food than to provide reasonable living and working conditions. Almost overnight, Barbados was transformed into a society dominated by rich planters, with an economy so focused on sugar culture that it was dependent upon England, Ireland, and North America for food and lumber.

The English planters in Barbados experienced little, if any, hesitation before purchasing human beings as slaves. Twenty-seven thousand Africans toiled in the island's sugar fields in 1660, surpassing the number of whites. After that date, the black population continued to grow while the number of whites declined. The planters eagerly participated in the Atlantic slave system that the Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch had expanded over the previous two centuries. Because mortality under the sugar regime was so high that Africans could not naturally reproduce their numbers, the planters found it necessary to import slaves. Between 1640 and 1700, an estimated 135,000 Africans were imported into Barbados, yet in the latter year about 42,000 survived.

The Barbadians, like other English and Europeans, justified enslaving Africans for life — and for the lives of their progeny — on the grounds that these dark-skinned people were pagan, uncivilized, and inferior human beings. Europeans believed that hierarchies existed in human society, with Christians, for example, superior to heathens. Europeans found serious deficiencies in African religion, social customs, dress, and political organization; they consid-

ered the people of sub-Saharan Africa lower on the scale of humanity and justifiably enslaved. Most crucial for the English was skin color. English language and culture differentiated sharply between white and black, with whiteness denoting something that was good and pure, and blackness suggesting sin and filth. Some people suggested that the Africans' dark brown color resulted from God's curse on the descendants of Ham, who had viewed the nakedness of his father, Noah.

The English, like other Europeans, focused on differences rather than on traits they held in common with Africans, traits such as belief in a single Creator, overwhelming physical similarities, and comparable livelihoods as agriculturalists and livestock raisers. In encounters with Africans, the English emphasized differences, comparing favorably their own light skin to the Africans' darker color. They exaggerated the variation in skin shade by calling Africans ""blacks," or using the Spanish and Portuguese term "Negroes." While the demand for labor was the fundamental reason for slavery's development in Barbados, these English cultural attitudes, the example of the Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch, and the existence of the Atlantic slave trade made the decision to purchase Africans seem natural. Because Africans seemed so different, they could be held as property. As troubling as it is to contemplate, many English masters considered their slaves much like livestock.

In 1661, the Barbados ruling class legislated a slave code, which replaced a series of statutes passed in earlier years but now missing. It was of prime influence on lawmakers in other English colonies as they became concerned about keeping control over growing populations of forced laborers. In writing the law, Barbados assemblymen had economic motives in wanting to legalize permanent, hereditary bondage and retain power over recalcitrant workers. But the legislators also betrayed their belief that the physical and cultural inferiority of Africans meant that they should not be subject to the same protections and laws as whites. The preamble of the code labeled blacks "an heathenish, brutish and an uncertaine, dangerous kinde of people." The Barbados slave code defined slaves as both property and human beings, with more emphasis on the former. As chattel whose bondage was lifelong and heritable, they held a status that had gone out of practice for English people centuries before. Slaves lacked most of the rights of free whites and indentured servants. Only to a minimal extent did the Barbados code give Africans protection. A master could without penalty injure or kill a slave during punishment; if the owner murdered the African for no reason, and this fact could be proven, then the maximum penalty was a fine of about 25 pounds. The code distinguished in a number of ways between indentured servants and slaves. Even minimum living standards differed, for the code specified food and clothing allowances for servants but only clothing allotments for slaves. Servants had the right to a jury trial and could sue their masters in court if not treated decently. Masters could be charged with murder if they killed a servant and fined for failure to provide medical care. Servants had their terms extended by several years for theft, physically attacking their master, or running away, while an enslaved African would be whipped, branded, or even put to death for these same misdeeds.

Planters in Barbados and other colonies reserved the most barbaric sentences for slaves accused of rebellion. When a plot was uncovered in Barbados in 1675, the magistrates executed 35 Africans by burning them alive or beheading them and dragging their bodies through the streets. The intent, of course, was to make an example of them to other slaves. In Jamaica, where mountains and its larger size increased the possibility of successful uprisings, the authorities tried to deter plotters with even more extreme measures. After a 1678 insurrection, a white overseer described the torturing of one participant: "His leggs and armes was first brocken in peeces with stakes, after which he was fasten'd upon his back to the Ground — a fire was made first to his feete and burn'd uppe by degrees; I heard him speake severall words when the fire consum'd all his lower parts as far as his Navill. The fire was upon his breast (he was burning neere 3 houres) before he dy'd."

The Barbados code of 1661 contained provisions that would become common in slave codes in other English colonies. Their purpose was to control the behavior of blacks and thereby prevent opportunities for rebellion. Planters were expected to police their slaves and keep them from acquiring weapons. Blacks were forbidden to travel without a pass and could be whipped by any white who discovered them abroad without written permission. The Barbados lawmakers omitted from their slave code any injunction against interracial sex, probably because they wanted to retain legal access to slave women. Mulatto children sometimes received higher status than Africans, with such job assignments as house servant or craftsman, but if their mother was a slave, so were they. Occasionally an owner/father freed his mulatto children and their mother, but manumission was rare in 17th-century Barbados. Freed people remained subject to the slave code, and could not vote, own any considerable amount of land, or hold well-paying jobs. Thus, Barbados, like other English colonies subsequently, created a caste system based on skin color and perceptions of race. All Africans and their children, even those who were half-English, were classified as blacks and retained a subordinate legal and social status.

While the founding of Virginia predated Barbados by 20 years, the transition from a labor force dominated by indentured servants to one comprised largely of slaves proceeded much more slowly there and in neighboring Maryland than in the sugar islands. The Jamestown settlement faltered badly for a decade after initial landfall in 1607. Many of the colonists were ill-suited for agriculture and refused to work. They stirred up trouble with the Native Americans by stealing corn and attacking without provocation. Mortality was devastatingly high as a result of disease and lack of food. Virginia gained a more secure footing after 1617 with the adoption of tobacco as its cash crop. Just as Barbadians would later find a market in catering to Europeans' craving for sugar, Virginians tapped a new, quickly expanding market for American "smoke." At the same time, the Virginia Company revised its policies so that individual planters could own land. Indentured servants were attracted to the colony with the promise of acreage at the end of their service.

The first record of Africans arriving in Virginia dates from 1619, though at least one woman may have come earlier. While some historians have conjectured that these blacks became indentured servants, little is known of their status. According to colonist John Rolfe, a Dutch ship left "20 and odd Negroes" at the plantation of Abraham Piersey, a representative of the Virginia Company and the wealthiest man in the colony. While slave traders brought more Africans in subsequent years, no great shift to slave labor occurred soon. In 1625, Africans numbered 23 of a total Virginia population of over twelve hundred. Fifteen were the property of two men: Abraham Piersey and George Yeardley, who had served as governor. After the founding of Maryland in 1634, the percentage of Africans in the Chesapeake population remained low. In 1660, about 900 blacks and 24,000 Europeans lived in Virginia and Maryland. The contrast by that year with Barbados, where Africans outnumbered whites, can be explained by the continuing immigration of European servants. Unlike the situation on the small sugar island, good tobacco land remained available in the Chesapeake until at least 1660. Only after that date, as accessible land became scarcer and more tempting opportunities opened up in Carolina and the Middle Colonies, did the supply of white labor decline. When the number of white immigrants decreased, but the demand for labor continued to grow, Chesapeake tobacco planters turned to African slaves. The percentage of blacks in the total population expanded from 3.6 percent in 1660, to 7 percent in 1680, 13 percent in 1700, and 19 percent in 1720. In the late 17th century, the monopoly of the Royal African Company to import enslaved Africans into English colonies limited the development of slavery in the Chesapeake. When the monopoly ended in 1698, the supply of black laborers increased greatly.

Much debate has surrounded the status of the blacks in Virginia prior to the 1660s, when the assembly passed a series of statutes formally establishing slavery. Some historians have argued that Africans were treated much like white indentured servants in these early years, while others point to distinctions made between Africans and Europeans. During these decades, some blacks achieved freedom and even acquired land. But others remained servants for life, despite the lack of a law condoning perpetual bondage. Virginians, like colonists elsewhere, adopted slavery by custom, codifying its existence only after its significance became clear.

Evidence concerning slavery in Virginia before 1640 is spotty. Traders sold Africans to white Virginians much as they would have marketed them in other colonies, as part of the Atlantic slave system which took people from Africa to serve as slaves in the New World. Early Virginia documents distinguished consistently between white servants and blacks, always with the suggestion that Africans were subordinate. In a 1627 will, Governor George Yeardley bequeathed his "goode debts, chattels, servants, negars, cattle or any other thing" to his heirs. Censuses of the 1620s point to a lower regard for Africans: English settlers were listed with full names while most Africans were enumerated simply with a first name or designated as "negar" or "Negro." For example, Anthony and Mary Johnson, who by the 1650s acquired a plantation and owned a slave, were referred to as "Antonio a Negro" and "Mary a Negro Woman" in earlier records. On the other hand, the fact that blacks like the Johnsons obtained freedom and land demonstrates that a rigid system of perpetual servitude was not yet in place in Virginia before 1640. While some Africans who came during the early years remained enslaved throughout their lives, others like the Johnsons and Anthony Longoe, who obtained his freedom in 1635, held a status closer to indentured servitude.

After 1639, evidence that slavery existed in Maryland and Virginia — and that lifetime hereditary bondage was judged appropriate for Africans but not for Europeans — is more plentiful. Maryland moved much more quickly than Virginia, for just five years after settlement the assembly noted the legality of slavery, parenthetically, in two separate laws. One act placed limits on the terms of service of "all persons being Christians (Slaves excepted)" who arrived in the colony as servants without indentures; the other law provided that "all the Inhabitants of this Province being Christians (Slaves excepted) Shall have and enjoy all such rights liberties immunities priviledges and free customs within this Province as any naturall born subject of England." In Virginia in 1640, the court distinguished between two white servants and an African who ran away by requiring the whites to serve four additional years while the black man received a term for life. From the 1640s on, colonial records made more frequent reference to lifetime bondage for Africans and their children. The tax laws of both Virginia and Maryland, passed in 1643 and 1654 respectively, further demonstrated that the colonists viewed Africans as different from themselves. Everyone who worked in the field was to be taxed — all men and black women. White women apparently were not expected to tend tobacco. Both colonies also excepted blacks, but not white servants, from the obligation to bear arms.

As more and more Africans arrived in the Chesapeake colonies after 1660, the assemblies responded by passing laws to define and justify slavery. And as in Barbados, they devised statutes to control blacks as well. The result was legal entrenchment of the institution and the narrowing of opportunities for Africans to become free. In the early 1660s, Virginia joined Maryland in enacting laws that recognized differences in the terms of white servants and African slaves. Statutes passed by both colonies defined slavery as lasting a person's lifetime and descending from mother to child. Colonists conceived slavery to be the normal status of Africans but not for Europeans.

In the last third of the 17th century, both Chesapeake colonies created in statute a clearly articulated caste system based on perceptions of race. A person's racial classification denoted status: all Africans and their descendants experienced severe discrimination, whether enslaved or free. Chesapeake lawmakers also made emancipation as difficult as possible. In

1667, Virginia ruled that conversion to Christianity would not result in freedom. Two years later, the assembly held that any master who killed a slave during punishment would not be guilty of a felony. Evolving black codes banned interracial marriage, forbade owners from freeing their slaves except under extraordinary circumstances, and restricted slaves from traveling without permission, marrying legally, holding property, testifying against whites, or congregating in groups. In 1705, the Virginia assembly declared all slaves to be real estate rather than personal property, a change Barbados had made in 1668. Virginia also gathered its various laws governing slavery into the slave code of 1705, an action Maryland took in 1715.

As in Barbados, these statutes limited the liberties of free blacks, for legislators generally failed to distinguish between enslaved and free Africans when proscribing behavior. In 1705, for example, the Virginia assembly made it illegal for any black person to strike any white, even an indentured servant. This included self-defense. Free blacks were barred from owning white servants, holding office, and testifying in court. They constantly faced the threat of reenslavement. Thus, during the years from 1660 to 1720, as the population of Africans and African Americans grew in the Chesapeake, colonial elites developed increasingly rigid legal codes that restricted the rights of slaves and free blacks. These laws, including ones against miscegenation, raised the wall between blacks and whites and bonded the loyalties of lower class whites to the elites, thus reinforcing social hierarchy based on skin color rather than economic condition.

In New England, slavery developed in yet another variation. While the Puritan magistrates of Massachusetts Bay Colony established the institution by statute as early as 1641, the employment of enslaved Africans remained marginal throughout the region. In 1660, blacks numbered 600 of a total New England population of 33,000; until 1720 they were about two percent of the region's inhabitants. The foundations of New England's economy were farming, fishing, and trade. Families supplied most of the labor needed to raise grains and livestock. Those who required additional help employed day laborers for busy times such as planting and harvest or, if they had the capital, purchased a few indentured servants or slaves. Only in Rhode Island's Narragansett county did planters own considerable numbers of Africans.

In the words of historian Winthrop Jordan, "The question with New England slavery is not why it was weakly rooted, but why it existed at all." His conclusion was that New Englanders, like other English people, were prepared by their ethnocentric attitudes to regard Africans as "strangers" who could be justifiably enslaved. Focusing on differences in skin color, customs, and religion, the Puritans regarded Africans as "other." Nevertheless, Jordan also demonstrated that economic interest was important, for New England merchants quickly saw promise in a lucrative trade with the burgeoning sugar islands. While exploiting the labor of Africans in wheat and rye fields proved unnecessary, sending provisions to Caribbean sugar plantations became the backbone of New England trade.

For both cultural and economic reasons, New Englanders had little inclination to question the enslavement of blacks. The Massachusetts Bay Colony, in its Body of Liberties of 1641, limited slavery to "lawfull Captives taken in just warres, and such strangers as willingly sell themselves or are sold to us." Connecticut and Plymouth adopted the same policy, which justified both the sale of Native Americans whom they took as prisoners of war and the purchase of Africans who were captured by someone else. Even in Rhode Island, where the government tolerated Europeans of various religions and attempted to deal fairly with Indians, slavery and the slave trade flourished. A law passed in 1652 by representatives of two of the four Rhode Island towns limited bondage to ten years. The statute had little or no effect, in part because the two towns most involved in purchasing slaves had not given their consent.

Though slavery was milder in New England than in the West Indies or southern mainland colonies, primarily because relatively few Africans lived in the region, legal codes nevertheless defined both enslaved and free blacks as a separate and subordinate caste. The penal-

ty suffered by New England slaves for striking whites was less severe than in the plantation colonies, but still the law privileged Europeans of every status. Emancipation remained a possibility in New England, though masters were required to post bond to provide support in case the freed person should lack employment or become disabled in later years. Masters were subject to a charge of murder if they killed a slave, including their own. And while Massachusetts banned sexual relationships and marriages between whites and blacks, none of the other New England colonies followed suit. The marriages of slaves had legal standing and could not be disrupted legally, for blacks were allowed, in fact required, to marry under the same rules as whites.

Despite this relatively moderate regime for slaves, New England's laws concerning the status of free blacks underscored the Puritans' commitment to marking all dark-skinned people as a caste separate from whites. Like the English of the West Indies and the Chesapeake, New Englanders created a rigidly biracial society. Slave codes banned all blacks and Native Americans from bearing arms, required them to carry passes when traveling, and prohibited them from being on the streets after 9 p.m. None of the New England colonies allowed freed people to serve on juries or vote, nor admitted more than a few black children to the public schools. Free blacks were subject to special laws and discrimination that limited their economic opportunities. Most did the same kinds of jobs they had performed as slaves. In Boston, freed people could not own pigs; in South Kingston, Rhode Island, they could own no livestock at all. In 1717, Connecticut went so far as to pass a law forbidding free blacks from residing, purchasing land, or setting up a business in a town without obtaining permission. Though probably not enforced, the law pertained to people already living in towns, thus making their residence and livelihood cruelly tenuous.

While New England developed an extensive legal framework for its caste society, slaves remained a small proportion of the labor pool. Their employment in the cities and on farms must be considered a by-product of the West Indies trade. When sea captains returned home with molasses to distill into rum, they also brought "parcels" of Africans for sale. Massachusetts and Rhode Island merchants participated in the transatlantic slave trade, carrying Africans to the West Indies and mainland colonies. New England's export of fish, livestock, foodstuffs, and lumber to the sugar islands provided much of the credit the region needed to pay for English manufactures; the distilling and sale of rum to Africa and the mainland American colonies supplemented this trade. The Caribbean connection rescued an economy that lacked staple crops like sugar and tobacco that the British Isles and Europe wanted. When the West Indies market emerged after 1640, John Winthrop appreciated its importance. He wrote that the Massachusetts economy was saved when "it pleased the Lord to open to us a trade with Barbados and other Islands in the West Indies." Though a relatively small number of New Englanders owned black slaves, the region was equally implicated in the Atlantic slave system with Barbados and Virginia. New Englanders failed to question the depopulation of Africa by means of slave ships because it formed the basis of their livelihood. Their prejudices against "strangers" with dark brown skin and the fact that the Atlantic slave trade had been operating for two centuries allowed them to participate without concern.

By the time South Carolina and the Middle Colonies became part of England's American empire in the 1670s and 1680s, Anglo-American slavery was well defined. Their founders knew the institution and few questioned it. The adoption of slavery in South Carolina and Pennsylvania, settled by very different groups of English people, demonstrates how deeply ingrained was the assumption that blacks were an inferior race. Africans were inextricably linked with slavery and subordinate status in English minds.

South Carolina was "the colony of a colony"; it was established in 1670 to furnish provisions to Barbados. Many early white settlers migrated because they had capital to develop plantations and owned Africans to do the work, but could obtain insufficient land on

Barbados. The Carolina proprietors offered generous acreages; planters with a family and just a few slaves could gain hundreds of acres. From the colony's outset, blacks comprised between one-fourth and one-third of the population. They produced livestock, food, firewood, and barrel staves for Barbados and other Caribbean islands. The institution of slavery did not develop in South Carolina: it was imported from Barbados.

The West Indies provisions trade had limited potential, primarily because merchants in New England and the Middle Colonies made excellent connections there, so Carolinians looked for alternative ways to get rich. Like other American colonists, they needed credits to pay for manufactured goods from England. The settlers established trade with Native Americans for deerskins, which found a ready market in England. They also encouraged enslavement of Indians by purchasing thousands of people for sale in the West Indies. The volume of this trade in humans is suggested by the fact that, though most of the enslaved Indians were exported, in 1708 they comprised 15 percent of the colony's population.

The commodity that proved most successful was rice. It helped white South Carolinians become the wealthiest of mainland British colonists. But for blacks the consequences of rice monoculture in the Carolina coastal lowlands were far less positive. Before planters adopted full-scale rice production, slaves had performed a variety of jobs in crafts, timber, livestock, and agriculture. Their workloads were moderate, especially in comparison with those who suffered under the sugar regime of Barbados. With the conversion to rice, planters imported thousands of enslaved Africans, to the extent that blacks reached 70 percent of the coastal population. By 1708, they outnumbered whites in the colony as a whole.

The South Carolina legislature responded to the rising number of blacks by adopting a harsh slave code modeled on that of Barbados. The 1696 South Carolina law was the first comprehensive code issued by an English mainland colony. The collective frame of mind of the assemblymen can be identified in its language, which alleged that slaves were "of barbarous, wild, savage natures, and such as renders them wholly unqualified to be governed by the laws, customs, and practices of this Province." Among its provisions, the law's barbarity is demonstrated by the punishments it set down for running away, a special concern of Carolina masters whose slaves could escape to Spanish Florida, the towns of sympathetic Native Americans, or autonomous maroon communities in remote areas. The 1696 code provided that slaves who attempted to flee the colony should be executed. If blacks did not try to leave South Carolina when they absconded, they received punishments of increasing severity with each offense: whipping, branding with R, whipping and an ear cut off, castration for men and removal of the other ear for women, and death or laming. In subsequent years, the assembly refined the 1696 code, adding a requirement for passes and establishing a patrol system that incorporated the militia. Like West Indies planters, whites in South Carolina believed that harsh measures were needed to overpower the black majority — in the words of the 1696 code, to "restrain the disorders, rapines and inhumanity, to which [slaves] are naturally prone and inclined."

As the rice regime became more entrenched, much of the flexibility in job assignments and living conditions that had existed during the early years was lost. In 1717, the colony prohibited sexual relations between whites and blacks, whether enslaved or free. In 1721, free blacks lost the franchise (some had voted before that year), and after 1722, emancipated slaves had to leave the colony within a year or be reenslaved. The South Carolina legislature expected to avoid the question of freed people's status by forcing them out.

The adoption of slavery in the Mid-Atlantic colonies, particularly Pennsylvania, provides an instructive comparison with the case of South Carolina. The Dutch had imported Africans into New Netherland as early as 1626; by the English takeover in 1664, slavery was firmly rooted in the region. Of the Middle Colonies, New York had the highest proportion of blacks in the population: 11.5 percent in 1703 and 15 percent in 1723. The comparable proportions in

the Chesapeake were 13 percent and 19 percent respectively. The ubiquity of racism in English America, however, is best exemplified by Pennsylvania. Established in 1681 by William Penn, a leading Quaker, the colony was to be a "holy experiment" in cooperation among people of different religions and backgrounds, with particular attention to relations between Indians and whites. Despite warnings against perpetual bondage by a few Friends, including George Fox, the founder of Quakerism, slavery quickly became woven into the social fabric of the young settlement. A majority of the early Quaker elite owned slaves. Until 1720, blacks comprised approximately 12 percent of Philadelphia's population and were a sizeable proportion of the rural work force. Penn himself purchased enslaved Africans, arguing that they were preferable to indentured servants because they could be held for life. His concern about fair treatment included Native Americans but not the people of Africa. A number of wealthy immigrants to the new colony came from the West Indies. They brought both their slaves and their connections to establish trade between the islands and the Quaker colony, a trade that included importation of blacks. Like New England, Pennsylvania found a market for its livestock, lumber, and foodstuffs in the sugar islands. This trade proved essential to the colony's growth.

A few Pennsylvania Quakers questioned the morality of slavekeeping during the first decades. Among them were four Germantown Friends who in 1688 issued the first American antislavery protest; they warned that people in Europe would be shocked to learn "that the Quackers doe here handel men, Licke they handel there the Cattle." After 1720, the number of manumissions slowly grew and slave ownership came under increasing attack as a sinful and unjust practice. The influx of Germans and Scots-Irish from the 1720s to the 1750s provided employers with the option of purchasing indentured servants rather than enslaved African women and men.

In the early years, however, most Pennsylvanians simply accepted the practice of slaveholding as worked out in other English colonies. The Frame of Government, the Laws Agreed Upon in England, and the assembly's initial legislation neither legalized nor banned slavery. Slaveholders relied on custom to protect their property rights. At first, blacks were subject to the same courts and laws as whites, but gradually the colony established the racial line. In 1700, the assembly, dominated by Quakers, recognized differences in the terms of servants and slaves; at about the same time it established separate courts without juries for all blacks, slave and free. Provincial law also held that the rape of a white woman, buggery, and burglary were capital offenses for blacks but not for whites, and ordered black men who attempted rape of a white woman to be castrated. Then in 1706 the assembly revised this law by prescribing for attempted rape or theft, 39 lashes, branding on the forehead with the letter R or T, and exportation from the province. In 1726 Pennsylvania established a comprehensive slave code. While more lenient towards slaves than those of South Carolina and Virginia, it seriously restricted the activities of free blacks, who could be returned to bondage for vagrancy or marrying a white. Justices of the peace could bind out free black children as apprentices without the parents' consent. Pennsylvania did not force freed people to leave its borders, nor did the colony restrict in-migration from other regions. Nevertheless, it established a caste system based on skin color as clearly and as certainly as any other English province.

By 1720, the practice of slavery ranged widely in the British colonies, from the West Indies where unremitting toil in the sugar fields and early death awaited newly arrived Africans, to New England and Pennsylvania, where tasks were varied and emancipation remained possible. Everywhere, however, blacks held a subordinate position whether they were enslaved or free. This caste system based on notions of race had its origins in both the English dependence on slave labor and their cultural prejudice against dark-skinned people. The plantation colonies relied on blacks to produce sugar, tobacco, and rice, while New England and the Mid-Atlantic region benefited from the trade that profitable staple crops occasioned. Colonial British America developed economically from the labor of Africans and their

American-born children. English colonists participated in the Atlantic slave system because it was already in place and because it profited them richly. They justified the adoption of slavery and their barbaric laws by arguing that Africans were an inferior race. The entrenchment of slavery reinforced that belief.

Table 2.1

Atlantic Slave Trade: Destinations, 1601-1810

17th Century	
British North America	10,000
Europe	25,100
Spanish America	292,500
British Caribbean	263,700
French Caribbean	155,800
Dutch Caribbean	40,000
Brazil	560,000
Total	1,347,100
18th Century	
British North America	348,000
Spanish America	578,600
British Caribbean	1,401,300
French Caribbean	460,000
Brazil	1,891.400
Total	4,679,300

From: Philip D. Curtin, The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census *(Madison, 1969), 119-20, 215-16.*

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Chapter Three

Africans In 18th-Century North America

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Well before the arrival of Columbus in 1492, the diverse Indian peoples who had inhabited the Americas for at least 15,000 years encountered occasional newcomers. We know, for example, that Vikings from Norway and Greenland settled for several years in Newfoundland around 1000 A.D. There are interesting indications that other ocean voyagers may also have appeared once or twice from Europe, Africa, and Asia at earlier times. Did these visitors arrive voluntarily, or were they simply swept to America by powerful winds and currents? We do not know for sure, but there is little evidence as yet that they stayed long, travelled widely, or had any significant genetic or cultural impact. These hazy pre-Columbian contacts make rich subjects for speculation, but they appear to have been brief and limited encounters at best. It was not until Columbus that transatlantic voyages could at last be regularly repeated, and then endlessly continued, building ever-increasing links between continents and human populations that had known virtual isolation. The enormous forced diaspora of African peoples to the western hemisphere is part of this larger pattern.

Within a generation of Columbus's arrival, strange diseases, destructive warfare, and harsh labor policies decimated the local population of the West Indies, and, eager to exploit the bounty of these semitropical landscapes at all costs, Spanish traders began to import workers from Africa. Over the next three centuries other European powers — Portugal, France, Holland, and England — competed in this brutal and highly profitable traffic, selling captive workers to the labor-hungry European colonies in America. All told, well over 12 million persons from diverse African cultures endured this exodus, and several million others perished in the so-called "Middle Passage." No larger forced migration had occurred in all of human history. Most of these newcomers were put to work clearing land and harvesting crops on large plantations in the Caribbean and in Central and South America.

In relation to the entire transatlantic slave trade, relatively few Africans, perhaps no more than 600,000, were brought to North America. (Brazil, in comparison, absorbed 2.5 million.) Most of the new arrivals reached the mainland English colonies on the Atlantic seaboard after 1700. Though the Spanish had established a settlement at St. Augustine in Florida in 1565, it remained a small outpost intended primarily to protect Spanish shipping lanes. The French colonized Canada in the 17th century and Louisiana in the 18th century, importing to the latter colony several thousand Africans who, though their numbers were small, would eventually make dramatic contributions to the culture of the deep South and of America more broadly. But it was the English who eventually orchestrated the largest flow of unfree African workers to the North American continent.

As white landowners shifted from a labor system of indentured servitude to one of chattel slavery near the end of the 17th century, the African population in certain English mainland colonies swept upward. In the 40 years between 1680 and 1720, the proportion of blacks in Virginia's population jumped from 7 percent to 30 percent. "They import so many Negros hither," observed planter William Byrd II, "that I fear this Colony will some time or other be confirmed by the Name of New Guinea." In South Carolina during the same four decades the African increase was even more pronounced: from 17 percent to 70 percent. "Carolina," commented Swiss newcomer Samuel Dyssli in 1737, "looks more like a negro country than like a country settled by white people." By the 1740s and 1750s an average of 5,000 persons per year, arriving directly from Africa or via the West Indies, were being sold into bondage on American docks. Between 1770 and 1775, Charleston, South Carolina, alone received 4,000 slaves per year through the quarantine station at Sullivan's Island, "the Ellis Island of Black America."

Most blacks reached North America relatively late in the whole transatlantic deportation, and they made up a surprisingly small proportion of the entire forced diaspora — probably as little as 5 percent. The passage from West Africa to North America was even longer and more arduous than to countries further South, but the climate and the work regime in North America proved slightly less devastating on balance. So survival rates were higher, life expectancy extended further, and natural increase made itself felt more rapidly than in most New World plantation cultures. U.S. planter-capitalists were not blind to these demographic patterns. Since they possessed an expanding labor force, subjected to hereditary servitude, they were eventually willing to tolerate an end to the American slave trade, even while arguing fiercely for the preservation and extension of race slavery itself.

By 1807, therefore, the legal importation of Africans had finally been abolished by the government of the young United States. As a result, the majority of black Americans living in the United States today are the descendants of African men and women hauled to North America by aggressive English and American traders in the course of the 18th century. It is worth remembering, for comparison, that the largest migrations to the United States from Europe did not take place until the late 19th and early 20th centuries. So the average white resident in the U.S. has a shorter American ancestry, as does the average Asian-American citizen. The fact that African Americans arrived in large numbers at an early stage means that, despite the enormous constraints of slavery, they had an immediate, varied, and lasting influence on the evolution of American culture that is only now beginning to be understood more fully.

During the 16th century a few Africans had penetrated the North American interior in the company of Spanish explorers, as they moved out of the West Indies in search of Indian slaves, precious metals, and possible routes to the Pacific. In 1528, for example, Panfilo de Narvaez led a huge contingent of 400 persons, white and black, to the Gulf Coast of Florida, but poor planning, harsh conditions, and fierce Indian resistance soon devastated the entire force. Only four survivors — three Spaniards and an African named Estaban — managed to return to Mexico City in 1536 after spending years among the diverse people of the South and Southwest. (Their experiences are recorded in the fascinating narrative of one survivor, Cabeza de Vaca.) Authorities in New Spain quickly retained Estaban as a guide for further exploration of the Southwest, where he met his death among the Pueblos in 1539. Estaban's unusual life provides a glimpse of the experiences that faced other African soldiers who accompanied early Spanish invaders throughout the Americas.

By the 17th century, black persons were again present among the sailors, traders, and colonists who probed the Atlantic seaboard. Frequently they had spent time in the West Indies and spoke one or more European languages; often they were of mixed European and African ancestry. The Dutch colony of New Netherland provides a case in point. In 1612, only three years after Henry Hudson had claimed the area for Holland, a mulatto crewman named Juan

Rodrigues from the West Indies deserted a Dutch ship in the Hudson River and spent a year among the Indians trading for pelts. By 1628 the Dutch had constructed a crude fort at the tip of Manhattan Island and planned to import enslaved Africans to augment the supply of farm laborers in the village of New Amsterdam. Several years later the Dutch West India Company imported additional slaves from the Caribbean to rebuild the fort, and by 1639 a Company map showed a slave camp five miles north of the town containing newcomers from the West Indies.

Though most black settlers were legally enslaved and some apparently lived in a separate settlement, these few initial African residents did not lead a life totally apart from other colonists in New Amsterdam. Some were armed and took part in raids against the local Indians; others were granted "half-freedom" (where they lived independently but continued to pay an annual tax); still others were manumitted completely by their owners. A few who professed Christianity were permitted to marry within the Dutch Reformed Church. Among 50 marriages recorded by the New Amsterdam Church from 1639 to 1652, 13 involved unions between black men and black women. In another, a man from Europe married a woman from Angola. The same Dutch ships that provided a few Africans to New Amsterdam occasionally traded with the infant English colonies as well. In 1619, for example, a Dutch vessel unloaded a score of Africans at Jamestown in Virginia, in exchange for much-needed provisions. But for the most part, the powerful Dutch slave traders confined their major traffic to the burgeoning plantation economies of the South Atlantic.

By the mid-1650s, however, stark changes were under way, influenced in large part to the struggles for power between rival seaborne European empires. In 1654 the Dutch lost control of Brazil, where they had been shipping thousands of Africans, so distant New Netherland suddenly became a more attractive destination for Dutch slavers from the South Atlantic. The first shipload of several hundred persons brought directly from Africa arrived at the mouth of the Hudson in 1655. More shipments followed, and many of the enslaved passengers were promptly resold to English planters in the Chesapeake colonies seeking additional workers. When the English seized New Amsterdam in 1664 and renamed it New York, hundreds of Dutch-speaking black residents found their situation took a turn for the worse.

A similar broad pattern of change for black newcomers also appeared in the English mainland colonies. Numbers increased gradually; racial designations took on new significance; legal codes imposed hereditary enslavement; and profit-conscious traders eventually undertook the importation of slaves directly from Africa. Records from the Plymouth colony (founded by the so-called "Pilgrims" in 1620) show that at least one "blackamoor" was present in the community by the early 1630s, and his name suggests that he had probably spent time in the Spanish Caribbean. The journal of John Winthrop, Governor of the larger Massachusetts Bay colony (founded in 1630), makes clear that in 1638, not long after the English defeat of the neighboring Pequots, a Boston sea captain carried Indian captives to the West Indies and brought back "salt, cotton, tobacco, and Negroes." Six years later, in 1644, Boston merchants sent several ships directly to the West African coast, a small beginning to a pattern of New England slave trading that would continue for a century and a half.

At the start of the 17th century Christian Europeans still tended to see political and religious, not physical, differences as the key divisions among mankind. Enemies in foreign wars and adherents to different faiths could be captured and enslaved. Hence, John Smith, a leader of the English colony at Jamestown, had been forced briefly into slavery by the Muslims when fighting in eastern Europe as a young man; "infidel" Pequots who opposed Winthrop's men in New England were sold into bondage in the Caribbean. Such enslavement was not always for life; conversion to the religion of the captor and other forms of good behavior could result in freedom. A law passed in the colony of Rhode Island in 1652 even attempted to limit the term of involuntary servitude to ten years.

But within half a century this somewhat ambiguous situation had changed dramatically in numerous ways. The population pressure at home that had provided the labor pool for England's initial colonies decreased in the wake of the Great Plague. Efforts to substitute Native American labor proved counterproductive, for colonists needed Indians as allies and trading partners. Moreover, Indian numbers continued to decline sharply due to devastating epidemics of novel diseases. With the establishment of tobacco as a profitable staple in the Chesapeake, the demand for fresh labor increased steadily, as did the wealth needed to obtain it. As Virginia's expanding economy reached the threshold where it could absorb whole shiploads of new workers imported directly from Africa, England's aggressive mercantilists proved ready to supply them. The new Royal African Company, which inherited the monopoly on English slave trading in 1672, began its direct shipment of Africans to the North American mainland in 1674.

Three other shifts consolidated this grim transition. In a surprising exception to the English legal tradition that children inherited the status of their father, it was agreed that in the case of African Americans, the offspring would inherit the status of their mother. Hence, the children of an enslaved female would also be enslaved for life — a move which dramatically increased the long-term profitability of owning a black woman. Secondly, the "headright" system, by which planters received new land for every family member or European servant they brought to the colony, was expanded to encourage the importation of Africans. Self-interested planter-magistrates, who were rich enough to make the expensive initial investment in enslaved workers brought from Africa, allowed themselves to obtain free land, as well as valuable labor, through every purchase. Finally, English colonists gradually agreed, first informally and then through legislation, that physical appearance — "race" — rather than religion would be the primary key to enslavement. While non-Christians could accept Christianity and demand freedom, dark-skinned persons could not change their appearance in order to improve their status and regain control of their own labor.

All of these interrelated changes took place during the second half of the 17th century, but the African population in North America remained extremely small compared to both the overall population of the colonies and the New World black population as a whole. By 1700 there were perhaps 1,000 black New Englanders in a population of roughly 90,000. Neighboring New York contained more than 2,000 African Americans in a total population of fewer than 20,000, but in the younger colonies of New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware, the number of blacks was smaller. In Maryland, a population exceeding 30,000 people included approximately 3,000 Africans; Virginia, with more than 60,000 inhabitants was twice as large, but the proportion of Africans, numbering nearly 6,000 by 1700, was roughly the same. In the Carolinas there were fewer than 17,000 Europeans and 4,000 Africans as yet. The entire black population of the English mainland colonies, therefore, was still well below 20,000 persons in 1700, a small speck in relation to the 1.6 million people who had already been deported from Africa to the Caribbean and Central and South America in the previous two centuries.

All this changed significantly after 1700. In the larger Atlantic context, the number of Africans deported to North America still remained small, probably totalling no more than five percent of the entire African diaspora by the time the international slave trade ended in the 19th century. But within the colonies of British North America, the transformation was dramatic. Rising immigration from Europe prompted unprecedented growth throughout the colonies, but the flow of workers from Africa grew at an even faster rate. For example, a recent study shows that between 1760 and 1775, when both these streams of fresh arrivals reached new heights, the sum of all Scottish, English, and German newcomers totalled 82,000, while Africans numbered 84,500, mostly concentrated in the southern colonies. During these 15 years before the American Revolution, out of 221,500 newcomers known to have crossed the Atlantic to British North America, nearly 40 percent of them were brought from Africa.

In contrast to the largely English migrations of the 17th century, many of the 18th-century European newcomers did not speak English as their native tongue. Others did not share a belief in Protestant Christianity. In addition, some had little knowledge or respect concerning the English Crown, and a great many came as indentured servants whose labor had been sold to others for a span of years. But what applies to many of these European arrivals applies far more dramatically to virtually all the Africans. The small proportion who had worked in the West Indies before coming to North America had heard limited English and perhaps glimpsed a version of Protestantism from afar, but all were only beginning to discover the harsh workings of the powerful British empire, and all were consigned to hereditary bondage by the mere fact of their racial origin. Year after year, shipload after shipload, they entered American harbors. Week after week, decade after decade, the local gazettes ran prosaic notices to advertise their arrival:

> Just Imported in the Ship Emperor, Charles Gwin Commander, about Two Hundred and Fifty fine healthy Slaves directly from Africa; to be sold on Wednesday the 29th…. (*South Carolina Gazette,* April 20, 1752.)

Men and women described as "healthy" in promotional advertisements often proved emaciated, despondent, and sick in body and spirit after the debilitating Middle Passage. Some died before they could be sold; others opted for suicide over forced bondage. A few were sold to northern farmers needing an additional hand or to urban artisans who planned to teach them a trade. But the vast majority were sold directly to colonial plantations along the Southeastern seaboard from the Chesapeake Bay to South Carolina — and, after mid-century, to Georgia. There they were put to work with other Africans clearing land, planting crops, and taking in the annual harvest. The daily labor routine, while always arduous, varied significantly depending upon the size and location of the plantation, the time of year, and the nature of the crop. Wheat and tobacco in the Chesapeake region, along with rice and indigo further south, each created their own calendar of demands.

Individuals, regardless of their age or background, quickly realized that survival would depend in part upon adopting foreign behavior and setting aside many old and familiar ways. This realization was strengthened by a "seasoning" period in which new slaves adjusted to their alien surroundings and learned, often brutally, that they were no longer their own masters. They would be obliged instead to submit to an external, unremitting, and arbitrary system of discipline and control in virtually every aspect of life. Reluctantly but inevitably, these Africans adopted at least the appearance of compliance, absorbing a series of new skills and lifeways, both from their masters and from other African Americans who had been in the area for several years or several generations. Paradoxically, these newcomers confronted two continents at once. On one hand, they experienced a stark introduction to contradictory elements of European culture in the age of merchant capitalism. On the other hand, they confronted the strange new environment of colonial North America.

By necessity, therefore, there was much to learn: new words, new foods, new tools, new stars, new clothes, new beliefs. But there was also much that could be remembered and adapted to the alien world of the American plantation. The same masters who demanded obedience also welcomed signs of money-saving self-sufficiency and of Old World skills that could be beneficial to the plantation economy. They frequently encouraged individual Africans who already knew how to fashion and bake clay pottery, how to cook okra and sweet potatoes, how to shape metal tools and carve canoes, how to herd cattle and kill alligators, how to cast nets for shrimp and fish, how to weave baskets from palmetto leaves and sweet grass, how to grow gourds and fashion them into containers and instruments. They were particularly attentive to persons and groups who had prior experience with semi-tropical West African crops such as rice, indigo, and cotton that would gradually transform the economy and landscape of the South.

While American planters encouraged and drew upon various advantageous skills among their African workers, they tolerated or overlooked a great many other cultural traits that were kept alive in the slave quarters through resourcefulness. Vital everyday matters such as house construction, hair styles, and modes of dress were subjects of constant negotiation. Slaves given an English name by their master might also retain a separate name from Africa, just as a black musician who learned to play the European fiddle to satisfy an English master might also build and play an African stringed instrument, using a traditional scale and rhythm, when entertaining fellow African Americans at the end of a long work day. Where African skills seemed dangerous to white overlords, skills such as the ability to communicate through drumming or to practice herbal medicine, efforts were made — with little success — to legislate such practices out of existence.

If it was hard for members of the planter class, despite all the sanctions available to them, to legislate successfully against such activities as playing drums and collecting herbs, it was far harder for them to control effectively the personal belief systems of their enslaved workers. When an Anglican missionary in colonial South Carolina asked an African-born slave why he resisted accepting Christianity, the man replied simply, "I prefer to live by that which I remember." During the late 17th and early 18th centuries, Englishmen who may earlier have converted an occasional bondservant now had difficulty fathoming, or altering, the enduring beliefs of workers brought directly from Africa. In part, the shifting demographic proportions meant that in any given slave community there were likely to be more persons, representing more African cultures, who had arrived more recently. Newcomers were less likely to have lived in the West Indies — separated from Africa and exposed to European colonization.

Nevertheless, for a variety of reasons the basic tenets of Protestant Christianity gradually took hold among an increasing proportion of black Americans over the course of the 18th century. While some slaves undoubtedly viewed acceptance of their master's faith as a betrayal, others may have seen conversion as a means for ingratiating themselves, or for informing themselves about the hidden sources of obvious European power. If some sought to identify with their oppressors and accepted a version of Christianity which taught compliance, others sensed quickly the subversive potential of a faith which affirmed that "the meek shall inherit the earth." On the eve of the American Revolution, a black preacher in Georgia expounded the belief that the Christian "God would send Deliverance to the Negroes, from the power of their Masters, as He freed the Children of Israel from Egyptian Bondage."

Moreover, Protestantism itself changed over the course of the century. Having discarded the notion of saints during the Reformation, Protestants could never offer the array of sacred figures that appealed to many Africans when they encountered Catholicism in the Caribbean and Latin America. But the mid-century revival known as the First Great Awakening, with its emphasis on individual salvation, fostered egalitarian thinking, lay preaching, and stress on baptism. It also brought more participatory music, bodily animation, and personal testimony into Protestant services. All these trends held attraction for potential African converts and helped win pockets of followers. They in turn converted others to an emerging and varied "black church" that incorporated Protestant beliefs while still retaining distinctive non-European elements of style and content. The process took many generations and must have involved deep controversy and debate. Unfortunately, we have almost no documentary record for this spiritual odyssey, which represents one of the most intriguing and little-known chapters in American intellectual and religious history.

If any one aspect of enslavement shook the belief systems of Africans and tested their capacity to survive, it was the overwhelming destruction of family and community bonds. Just as historians have debated the awesome impact of the slave trade on those who stayed behind — the removal of parents or loved ones, the exaggeration of local rivalries and jealousies, the escalation of warfare, the decimation of villages, the disruption of peaceful trade — they have

also argued over the consequences of removal for those deported to America. It is possible, on one hand, to overemphasize the destructiveness of the Middle Passage and underestimate the resilience of the captives themselves, stressing that they lost not only their stable families but also their capacity to recreate similar family structures in the New World. But it is equally possible, on the other hand, to de-emphasize the horrors of enslavement and/or to romanticize the phoenix-like capacities of African peoples in such a way that family and community structures seem to revive and flourish miraculously amid the chaos of slavery.

South Carolina slaves dancing the "juba," a West African dance.
("The Old Plantation," Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center, Williamsburg, Virginia.)

The complex truth lies somewhere between these two extreme representations. Masters proved reluctant to sanction marriage in ways that might foster dignity and self-esteem, traits that slaveholders often worked to destroy. At the same time, however, they grew increasingly aware that the bonds of family could make workers more reliable and interdependent, less willing to run away or rebel for fear of retribution against loved ones. For their part, enslaved Africans found themselves in an alien universe, populated by domineering Europeans and dark-skinned people from separate cultures who all looked, spoke, and behaved in different ways. The extreme isolation created by these surroundings also generated the will to overcome such loneliness. New personal ties were forged, one link at a time, reducing the social and cultural distance between once-separate African groups. The children and grandchildren of these unions, increasingly similar in appearance and behavior over time, emerged as a new and distinctive variety of colonist: the African American.

These "country-born" individuals harbored no personal knowledge of Africa. They frequently distinguished themselves from the "saltwater Negroes" who arrived annually by ship, unable to speak English and unfamiliar with the habits of the country and the grinding work routine of the American gulag. But they grew up in a diverse community, hearing various languages and learning a variety of folkways. Occasionally, though not always, viable families could emerge and endure under even the harshest physical conditions, but their long-term

sanctity and stability remained tenuous at best. A kind master could die; a lazy overseer could be replaced; an outspoken spouse could be sold; an overburdened parent could fall ill. Personal relationships, however strong and supportive, inevitably remained tenuous and fragile among the enslaved. For many of the people, much of the time, accepting this drastically diminished world became a necessity of bodily survival. Yet there were always those who resisted complete accommodation and who helped others to resist through their example.

Persons who live in relative freedom have great trouble imagining life in perpetual bondage. Confronted with the horrors of enslavement, we often ask why resistance was not more common, more aggressive, and more successful. Even in framing such questions, we demonstrate that we still have not fathomed the full magnitude of the domination or the enormous odds against rebellion. Nor have we registered sufficiently the myriad small ways in which individuals opposed and undermined the system as part of their continued struggle for survival. Like any oppressed work force denied the fruits of its labor, enslaved Americans often broke or "misplaced" or appropriated their tools. They frequently damaged the crops they were compelled to produce by refusing to plant and harvest on time, neglecting to weed or water the fields properly, or failing to process and transport the annual yield swiftly and efficiently.

Planters throughout the colonies came to know that numerous workers would be "sick" when work in the fields was heaviest. They also learned that imposing harsh conditions and severe punishments could result in the clandestine destruction of valuable crops. Burning down a barn full of tobacco or rice at harvest time, for example, offered one means of swift retaliation. Such acts of arson occurred frequently, for they provided immediate respite from intensive labor; they cost the master significant profits; and they proved notoriously difficult crimes to prove. Another clandestine act — poisoning — went beyond property damage in inflicting retribution. Slaves were intimately involved with every aspect of food preparation, and many had access to knowledge, from both sides of the ocean, regarding lethal plants. Since suspicion quickly focused upon house servants in the kitchen, the risks were high, but it only took occasional incidents, real or suspected, to keep a constant undercurrent of fear alive in the planter community.

Of far greater risk were acts of overt aggression. Statutes made it legal for free persons to kill slaves who struck them, whether in anger or self-defense. Nevertheless, acts of homicide against overseers or masters and their families occurred on a regular basis, and even the swift, and near certain, public execution of accused persons did not serve to prevent such desperate acts. Slave violence ranged from these sudden individual acts, usually unpremeditated and aimed at a single vulnerable tormentor, to more elaborate conspiracies, involving numerous persons and aimed at a whole community, or even at the entire slave system itself. As in any prison or gulag, thought of open rebellion was virtually universal; talk of such matters was far more guarded, and the undertaking itself was the bold and rare exception, for a number of obvious reasons. Urban slaves were closely watched, and rural slaves were widely dispersed; formal patrols were commonplace, and informants were everywhere. Long working hours and wide distances made communication difficult, as did forced illiteracy and diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Despite such huge obstacles, brave individuals joined in risky coalitions to attempt mass escape or armed insurrection. The leaders, like any guerilla commanders, always had to consider the same configuration of issues. Could they build a wide coalition without fostering discord or betrayal? Could they take advantage of dissent among whites, or natural disasters such as storms or epidemics, without sacrificing control over timing? Could they make, sequester, or capture sufficient weapons to win initial victories that would bring additional people and resources to their cause? Could they generate the ruthless violence needed for such an undertaking while still enforcing the level of order, restraint, and cooperation needed to make it a success? Could they learn from past experiences without becoming too discouraged by the woeful

outcome of past conspiracies. More often than not, the answer to several of these questions was "No," and the plotters reluctantly dropped their scheme before crossing the dangerous Rubicon.

Occasionally, however, events took on a life of their own, as rumors of revolt fueled fears among whites and raised hopes among blacks. Word of a foreign war, a heavenly sign, or a servile rebellion in some other colony could quickly bring matters to a head, increasing the sense of urgency among slaves and the feelings of paranoia among those who exploited them. In New York City, in 1712, enslaved workers set fire to a building and attacked those summoned to put out the blaze. They managed to kill nine persons and wound seven others, but they failed to spark a larger revolt. Half a dozen accused conspirators committed suicide after their capture, and more than 20 were put to death, some by burning alive. According to New York's governor, "there has been the most exemplary punishment that could possibly be thought of."

In 1729 in Louisiana, war with the Natchez Indians allowed Africans to plan an uprising against their French masters. But the plot was uncovered, and eight of the leaders, including a trusted African-born overseer named Samba Bambasa, were broken on the wheel. Ten years later in South Carolina, word of the outbreak of war between England and Spain helped prompt the Stono Rebellion, in which scores of slaves killed their English masters and began marching toward Spanish St. Augustine, only to be intercepted before their numbers could swell. Fearful of the colony's expanding black majority, officials displayed the heads of executed rebels on poles to discourage future revolts. In addition, they placed a prohibitive duty on slaves imported from abroad for several years, and they passed a new Negro Act further restricting the movement and assembly of black South Carolinians. A suspected slave plot on New York in 1741 led to even more fearsome reprisals, fueled by suggestions of clandestine support and encouragement from Spanish Jesuits and local poor whites.

By far the largest rift in the American ruling class occurred during the decades of the American Revolution, and enslaved African Americans were not slow to exploit this division to their best advantage. When free colonists took to the streets in 1765 to demand repeal of the Stamp Act imposed by British Parliament, slaves in Charleston began to chant "Liberty! Liberty!" in ways that frightened local officials. As the push for independence from English rule gained support in the North American colonies, leaders of the movement such as Patrick Henry and George Washington expressed well-founded fears that the British command might resort to arming the slaves in order to intimidate white planters into submission. In the spring of 1775 a free black pilot in the port of Charleston predicted to less informed workers on the docks that "there is a great war coming" that will "help the poor Negroes." Several months later, accused of helping the British smuggle guns to the Blacks and Indians, he was condemned and burned alive by the town's provisional revolutionary government.

In the fall of 1775, Virginia's Governor Dunmore issued a proclamation offering freedom to black men who took up arms with the British forces against the rebels. Many hundreds soon risked their lives to flock to his standard, only to die of smallpox in the crowded refugee camps. But with more than 500,000 blacks living in the rebellious colonies amid fewer than two million whites, both sides paid close attention to this widespread population. Those charging England's George III with "enslaving" them through unfair taxation now had to face the contradiction of their own slaveholding. Mocked by Tories for refusing to include African Americans in their revolution, the Patriots moved quickly to allow free blacks to take part in the armed struggle. Some 5,000 Blacks served with the Washington's Revolutionary Army during the course of the War of Independence, but the move to enlist slaves into service with promises of freedom was postponed through the entire conflict.

Following the defeat of the British and the surrender of General Cornwallis at Yorktown in 1781, thousands of African Americans who had cast their lot with the losing side were obliged to withdraw. Several thousand went by boat from New York City to Nova Scotia, for example, and some of these persons eventually made their way back to the West Coast of Africa.

Others, the property of loyalist slaveholders or the victims of unscrupulous dealings by British officers, found themselves deported to the sugar plantations of the West Indies. A few, but not many, of the black workers who had endured the war behind rebel lines received their freedom as part of an upswing in egalitarian thinking brought on by the rhetoric of the Revolution and the spread of evangelical Christian beliefs. George Washington and Robert Carter each manumitted several hundred persons from bondage in the decades after Yorktown, but they proved exceptions among southern planters in this regard.

At Philadelphia in 1787, when the issue of apportioning state representatives for a new national government arose in the Constitutional Convention, it was southern delegates who argued that slaves should be fully counted, since that would expand the congressional representation given to slaveholding states. For varied reasons, northern delegates took the position that enslaved blacks were property and should not be given any weight whatsoever in apportionment. Those northerners with a more racist bent found it demeaning to equate free whites with Africans in bondage; those favoring abolition felt it risky to affirm the institution of slavery in the new constitution. The eventual "three-fifths compromise" pleased none of these parties, but by allowing each state to count every slave as three-fifths of a free person for the determination of representation and direct taxes, it enshrined the institution of slavery in the founding document of the United States in a way that would haunt and embarrass future generations.

Bowing to the power of proslavery delegates, the framers went on to affirm the right of slaveholders to demand the return of fugitive slaves escaping into another state, and they banned the Congress in advance from taking any action to prohibit the African slave trade to the new republic for at least two decades. The new Constitution, ratified in 1789, represented a dream come true for a generation of relatively prosperous white men who opposed hereditary monarchy and defended the sanctity of private property, human or otherwise. But it was a crushing setback for most of the new nation's 750,000 African Americans, for most resided in the South and remained in bondage. Indeed, of more than 640,000 residing in the states below Pennsylvania, fewer than one in 20 possessed freedom. In contrast, scarcely one tenth as many blacks lived in the states from Pennsylvania northward through New England. Of these, almost one-third (nearly 18,000 persons) were already free, and others, as abolitionist forces influenced state constitutions, could look forward to legal freedom — though not to social equality.

Enslaved or free, North or South, African Americans in the new United States faced trying circumstances during the 1790s. If the success of the Haitian Revolution sparked hope that the enlightenment ideals of liberty and equality could cross racial boundaries, it also prompted a backlash of fear and repression among the white majority. In one congregation after another, from one Protestant denomination to the next, aspirations for integrated Christian worship gave way first to increased discrimination and then to outright separation. In a process that 200 years later might be characterized as "ethnic cleansing," momentum swung in favor of those willing to strengthen social and political barriers along racial lines. Idealistic signs of potential harmony and amelioration gave way to hardened racism and sanctioned exploitation in ways that forced separation and invited bitter reaction.

The pathos of this tragic era is well illustrated by what occurred in Richmond, Virginia, capital of the largest slave state, in late August 1800. A slave blacksmith named Gabriel organized hundreds of rebels in a well-planned conspiracy that was foiled only by a last-minute disclosure and hurricane-force summer storm. Faced with death, one of the captured leaders invoked the name of another revolutionary Virginian. "I have nothing more to offer than what General Washington would have had to offer, had he been taken by the British officers and put to trial by them," the accused conspirator told the court. "I know that you have predetermined to shed my blood," the political prisoner continued; "why then all this mockery of a trial?" Influenced by the rhetoric of the previous 40 years, and unafraid to employ it

against the hypocrisy of his captors one final time, he concluded eloquently: "I have ventured my life in endeavouring to obtain the liberty of my countrymen, and am a willing sacrifice to their cause; and I beg, as a favour, that I may be immediately led to execution."

Table 3.1

Population of British North America, 1700-1760

	1700	1720	1740	1760
New England				
European	91,113	166,937	280,805	436,917
African	1,608	3,956	8,541	12,717
Middle Colonies				
European	49,876	92,259	204,093	398,855
African	3,661	10,825	16,452	29,049
Southern Colonies				
European	68,547	138,110	270,283	432,047
African	19,617	54,098	125,031	284,040
Total				
European	209,536	397,306	755,181	1,267,819
African	24,886	68,879	150,024	325,806
Percent African American	11	15	17	20

From: **Historical Statistics of the United States from Colonial Times to 1970,** ***2 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1975), 2:1176-77.***

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Chapter Four

In Search of Freedom: Slave Life and Culture in the Antebellum South

Norrece T. Jones, Jr.

Few systems of mass exploitation have been as devastating or as effective in triggering physical and intellectual hostilities as the transatlantic slave trade and the institution following in its wake. Beginning in the 15th century, between ten and twelve million Africans were captured and then shipped to various points of European oppression. The full impact of this unprecedented and still unmatched forced migration cannot be appreciated until one considers that at least another ten to twelve million captives died in the march to the African coast or during the ocean voyage. Although fewer than 500,000 of those surviving eventually found themselves in North America, these women and men grew to four million despite being enslaved for almost three centuries on a land acclaimed for its freedom. Their sojourn and their ever-evolving ways of life during the final 65 years of their captivity are the focus of this essay.

By 1800 the overwhelming majority of North American bondpeople were concentrated in the southern United States. This did not deter their being moved with frightful frequency. Between 1790 and 1865, hundreds of thousands were torn from loved ones, friends, and relatives to labor in the fields to the south and southwest. These uprootings as well as those tracing back to Africa informed every unfree generation. Their thinking, actions, successes, and failures are of particular importance because while there is nothing unique about slavery — elites the world over have enriched themselves from it — the enslaved of North America are the only slaves ever to leave a substantial record of what their bondage meant.

Brute force, unrewarded toil, sordid punishment, and laws that legitimized each circumscribed the world of these New World slaves. Rarely were these boundaries broken. Males and females were exploited indiscriminately for their productive labor, but women also suffered the burden of being targeted for their reproductive and sexual potential. What emerges from the testimony of the women, men, and children who lived through this hellish existence is a burning desire to be free and an unending conflict with those who denied them that liberty. Theirs was a relationship of obdurate and irreconcilable enemies at war.

The odds against slave victory were more formidable than generally has been acknowledged. The enslaved confronted not only a powerful slaveholding elite, but a stolidly racist America. The fate of slaves and slavery during the birth of this nation documents in part its evolution. Despite the sacrifices of 5,000 blacks who served with the revolutionary forces that ended British colonial rule and despite much talk about human equality and inalienable rights, most states did not permit blacks to vote. Instead, slaveholding and non-slaveholding northern and southern whites, intent on hammering out a constitution, discussed not whether

blacks should vote but how they should be counted in apportioning population-based legislative representation on the basis of population.

Although the constitution guaranteed that slave escapees would be returned to their captors and laws in 1793 and 1850 assured strict federal enforcement of this slaveowner protection, black progress continued. Black protests and a determined white minority inspired gradual emancipation acts that began appearing throughout the North in 1780. By 1830 there were fewer than 3,000 slaves in the North. There was also a much smaller northern black population. The two were not unrelated: rather than await any proposed liberations, countless slaveholders liquidated their human property by selling them south. During this early national period, there was a precipitous drop in the black populations of almost every northern state. In New York alone, blacks were reduced from 7.6 percent of the inhabitants in 1790 to only 2.3 percent in 1830.

Just as slaves who were freed because of their military service in the Revolutionary War could forget neither past bondage nor the current enslavement of kinfolk and friends, former enslavers and a broader white community found it difficult to shake their view of blacks as mindless property to be disposed of at will. When comparing the prices of slave babies in the antebellum South and colonial Massachusetts, Frederic Bancroft in his study of the American domestic slave trade, observed that because slavery was "unprofitable" in New England, slave "infants were considered an encumbrance and, when weaned, were given away like puppies." No matter where or when black families lived before Emancipation in 1865, they were taught repeatedly that the comfort and security of whites always came first in America. The fleeting racial liberalism of the revolutionary era did not reverse that message.

In 1800 the United States had a population of 5.3 million; 18.9 percent of it — or 1 million individuals — were African American or African. Any hope among slaves that they might find allies in their struggle against bondage from anyone other than blacks themselves was tempered by a worsening in attitudes toward people of color. In their evolving consciousness as a class, white workers distanced themselves from blacks by defining not only their labor but their very beings as the exact opposite of all that they imagined about enslaved and free blacks. These laboring whites formed the vanguard of a popular new craze in the 1830s that was to become a national obsession: minstrelsy. This entertainment demonstrated the powerful lure black song and dance had for white audiences and performers and represents the complex beginning of a long collaboration between these cultures. At the time, however, this entertainment involved white men painting themselves black with burnt cork and performing as they perceived blacks to be; their interpretations were as ugly as the tattered clothing, elephantine gestures, and malapropisms that became the staples of their stage discourse and act.

A derogation of blacks occurred in the visual arts as well. Although almost always depicted as servants, the blacks on the canvases of 18th-century artists such as Charles Wilson Peale were nevertheless given a certain dignity and respect. Such sympathetic portraiture nearly vanished in the antebellum period. By the 1850s the American public was being bombarded with caricatures of blacks, simplistic views that added new meaning to denigration. Lithographers and publishers Currier & Ives printed them by the thousands. These hateful images were not the only signs of a hardening racism. Northern blacks were subjected regularly to racial pogroms in which white mobs violently assaulted blacks, sometimes killed them, and usually stole or destroyed their property. Whatever comfort these non-southern blacks derived from declaring themselves "free people of color," Negrophobic action corrected by assuring that they would be neither free nor slave.

The identity, status, and treatment of northern and southern free blacks are crucial elements in the study of antebellum slaves, for they, together with the least free among them, forged a distinctive worldview. Free black migration throughout the United States, a vigorous domestic slave trade, and an illegal importation of Africans that lasted through the Civil War

kept its intellectual and cultural tenets fluid, but solidly black. This is to say, not that black thinking and culture were simply reactions to whites, but that white racism was a critical dimension circumscribing black life everywhere in America. From that ring of ideas and actions, blacks discovered that the hostility toward them varied only in degree. It awakened some to appreciate other blacks, to recognize and esteem points of similarity that they had failed to see before. The force of race was used by blacks and whites and its power proved decisive.

In the war between enslavers and slaves, blacks had neither the arms nor the numbers to end slavery. But this conflict was about mental as well as physical captivity. The enslaved were subjected to propaganda that sought to channel all thinking about freedom into master-controlled venues such as manumissions for good behavior or opportunities for self-purchase. Ruling white words and actions made it clear that any revolutionary pursuit of freedom was more than foolish: it was mad. To keep the mad from inspiring the sane, and thus safe, after the discovery and suppression of perhaps the best-conceived conspiracy against slavery during the antebellum period, the Reverend Dr. Richard Furman told South Carolinian blacks a few things that "Negroes should know."

Acknowledging that there were pockets in the South — like the South Carolina Low Country where African Americans and Africans led by Denmark Vesey had plotted the revolt in 1822 — that blacks held numerical supremacy over whites, the Reverend Furman cautioned them that in the entire United States, they all, "including all descriptions, bond and free," continued to be "but little more than one-sixth part of the whole number of inhabitants…" He then explained that a federal defense — national racism — would work against them. Referring to fellow whites who "favour[ed] the idea of general emancipation," the very influential Furman predicted betrayal: "were they to see slaves in our Country, in arms, wading through blood and carnage to effect their purpose, they would do what both their duty and interest would require; unite under the government with their fellow-citizens at large to suppress the rebellion, and bring the authors of it to condign punishment."

Beneath this confident assertion of white impregnability lay an anxious fear. To keep it at bay, enslavers pursued a number of stratagems. While most whites — North and South — saw blacks as inferior, their articulation of that view depended significantly on their strength relative to those disdained men and women held collectively under them. White power was greatest where most blacks were slaves. Fantasies about this mass of blackness were acted out in theaters everywhere, but southern whites could suspend reality whenever they desired. Each time an adult black male or female was addressed as "boy," "girl," or, just plain "nigger," these nameless others were not only debased symbolically, but dehumanized. In so doing, whites effectively affirmed their superiority and safety, for children depended on and rarely failed to follow their parents.

This psychological assault was given physical meaning whenever bondpeople found themselves on the auction block. Examined like and described as brute animals, their position in white society was burned indelibly into their consciousness. Men and women were often stripped to the waist so that their sturdiness could be appraised; sometimes, slave traders would knead female stomachs to prove their capacity for offspring. When appropriate, male and female chattels had their unetched backs displayed as evidence of good behavior; only bad slaves would have revealed, instead, an embossed canvas, flesh etched with scars from whippings.

Frequently, much more than mental and physical stripping was required. Former slaves recounted non-slaveholding whites delegated to check whether slaves away from their owners' property were there with permission and to punish those who were not. These "paddyrollers" would creep up on them as they bathed naked in streams or lakes and then chase them. Whites hired to oversee slaves on plantations or to punish them in city gaols usually imitated their slaveowner-employers and flogged slaves only after they had bared the area des-

ignated for beating. This tradition may help to explain why one "soul trader," as slaves designated those who marketed human flesh and bones, found particular pleasure in paddling black females. In his 1849 autobiography, Kentucky-born ex-slave Henry Bibb moaned that he had not been able to protect his wife when Madison Garrison took her and declared that he would beat her. Bibb, his wife, and their child were being held by Garrison in a Louisiana prison while he sought buyers for them. With a hickory timber paddle in hand, "about one inch thick, three inches in width, and about 18 inches in length," Garrison took Mrs. Bibb into a prison room. As her husband recorded, he had "often heard Garrison say, that he had rather paddle a female, than eat when he was hungry — that it was music for him to hear them scream, and to see their blood run." Those destined for this punishment were always "stripped naked" first.

Disregard for the gender, age, and marital status of slaves was simply part of a larger offensive against African concepts of manhood and womanhood. When the father of Virginia slave Elizabeth Keckley was sold west to Tennessee, the family was devastated. Writing as a free woman in 1868, Keckley, who had purchased herself and eventually became the White House dressmaker for Mary Todd Lincoln, remembered vividly the separation, her parent's grief, and the chilling response of her mother's owner. After being told to stop her "nonsense" and "putting on airs," the mother of Keckley was rebuked for acting as if her husband was the only slave "sold from his family," and as though she were the "only [slave who] had to part." What next was said suggests that countless white women viewed female slaves as unlike themselves. Herself a mother and a wife, the plantation mistress declared: "There are plenty more men about here, and if you want a husband so badly, stop your crying, and go find another."

Whereas 19th-century southern white men articulated a sense of honor that demanded violent retaliation against any disrespect — especially that toward one's family — and European-American women increasingly were held up as paragons of morality to be protected at all costs, black women and men were accorded a treatment that was diametrically opposed to each of these values and beliefs. Slave women were forced to do labors that the ruling race considered unthinkable for white women and black men who dared to defend black women almost invariably suffered a swift and certain death.

According to scholar-activist Angela Davis, the widespread sexual violence that slave women were subjected to was aimed at black men as well. Citing the long world-wide history of conquering forces' rape of women — the just fruits of war — she argues that such attacks functioned not only as a source of sexual gratification, but as a way to impress upon vanquished men the totality of their defeat. Perhaps to deflect attention away from white rapists and the mulatto children whom they kept as slaves for themselves and their white children or, just as often, sold, some of the South's most respected and enterprising minds conjured up and perpetuated myths about black sexuality. Such pseudo-scientific musings were frequently used to formulate a scientific justification for the racism of the 19th century.

Opportunities abounded in the South to inflame imaginations. In contemporary white thinking, sensuality and fecundity were synonymous. This put African-American women and men, whose decision to have large families was rooted in a complex set of ideas and circumstances, in a position that had especially dire consequences for black females. Their high rate of birth provided white wives a convenient excuse for husbands who strayed onto slave grounds: surely they had been lured there by those hungry "wenches" whose insatiable appetites drove them to desire — and to hunt lustfully — a more civilized intercourse.

The paucity of clothing provided slave laborers and the nature of much of their work gave onlookers frequent exposure to black bodies. Travellers to the South often commented on bondsmen "stripped to the waist" as they toiled in urban industries. It is not too much to assume that long hours of hauling and pressing tobacco as well as other servile occupations developed ample muscles that must have glistened with sweat under the southern sun. Slave

Five generations of a slave family. (Library of Congress)

women, to prevent the bottoms of their dresses from getting wet, commonly drew them up with a string — popularly known as a "second-belt" — whenever they mopped floors or engaged in certain outdoor tasks. Glimpses of exotic flesh confirmed for many no doubt the primordial sexuality of these physically mature but supposedly mentally infantile blacks. The consequences of these perceptions, combined with the power to act on them, was detailed graphically by Harriet Jacobs after she escaped to the North. Writing in 1861 as alias fugitive Linda Brent, Jacobs recounted how she had been sexually stalked for years, beginning while still an adolescent, by her owner, a prominent Edenton, North Carolina, physician and father of 11 slave children. Her nightmarish existence was not eased any by the "jealous mistress" of the house. After describing her life with these enslavers, she sternly admonished Northerners who, despite their knowledge of "this wild beast of Slavery," acted "the part of bloodhounds" by tracking and returning slave self-emancipators to lifelong bondage.

While certainly most slave men and probably a significant number of bondwomen were spared the sexual exploitation of ruling whites, none except those too young or too old would have escaped the gruelling and tedious rigors of slave labor. On average, from sunup to sundown, enslaved blacks did everything from hoeing to cooking and carpentry to weaving. During harvest time, all slaves — whether house or field - usually were put to work gathering and preparing a variety of cash crops for market. A day's labor then could easily stretch to 14 hours. Those slaves assigned to labor in the urban dwellings or plantation "Big House" of wealthy slaveholders are traditionally described as "privileged." Their duties could entail crack-of-dawn marketing, ironing, cleaning, and a host of other tasks that sometimes ended with their serving late night parties. Rarely were these servants not "on call." But the vast majority of slaves worked outside, locked in a perennial cycle of planting, weeding, and harvesting.

Roughly three-quarters of the slave population toiled in the fields and most of them labored in gangs that produced cotton. The prominence of that crop ascended steadily following the 1790 invention of the cotton gin. The amount of work done by a healthy adult bondsman, or "full hand" was used to establish a standard for other slaves. Female slaves, especially those pregnant or nursing, sometimes were put in all-women gangs and designated "three-quarter" or "half" hands. Both women and men were expected to pick anywhere from 90 to 150 pounds of cotton a day. The cotton boom of the late antebellum period and the added burden that it put on workers, probably explains the marked increase in the number of miscarriages among slave women.

With a season that began in late July or early August and lasted almost until the new year in an area expanding from North Carolina through Arkansas and, later, Alabama and Mississippi, enslaved blacks made cotton an extraordinarily profitable crop. Their crowning glory, however, was the contribution that they made to the economy of the South and to the country as a whole. By the end of the antebellum period, the South was marketing all but one quarter of the nation's exports. It is no wonder that before the Civil War, the South was home to the 12 richest counties in the country. Whether producing sugar in Louisiana; rice in South Carolina and Georgia; tobacco in Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky, and Tennessee; or, part of the 5 percent of the slave population that toiled in mines, foundries, and other industries, the backbreaking labor of Africans and African Americans bestowed upon this land a wealth that they and their descendants have only experienced and been able to preserve in black folklore and song.

When interviewed years later, former slaves remembered bitterly their unrewarded toils and how they had protested against it. So common was their destruction of tools that southern whites invented an almost indestructible multipurpose implement that they called a "nigger hoe." In response to slave work slowdowns and other acts of resistance, slaveowners hired a corps of assistants to help them monitor closely slave movements and actions — particularly in the field. Even children, whose enslavers set them to doing light and not-so-light tasks between the ages of eight and 12, felt the gaze and the wrath of these oppressors. A mother who had escaped to Canada reported making pads for her children's heads after they had developed sore spots and lost hair from the constant carrying of water buckets, in a fashion retained from Africa, to workers in the field. Nancy Williams, an ex-slave from Virginia, never forgot what happened to her as a little girl when she and other children were directed to pick worms from tobacco leaves. Many decades later, Williams recalled that her master, discovering that she had missed some, "Picked up a hand full of worms,… an' stuffed 'em inter my mouth; Lordy knows how many of dem shiny things I done swallered, but I sho' picked em off careful arter dat."

An ubiquitous reminder of any undone or poorly done task was also used as a primary incentive for adult slaves. Charles Ball, a Maryland bondsman who early in the 19th century was torn from his wife and children when his owner sold and shipped him to South Carolina, described intimately each detail of this most familiar spur:

> The staff is about 22 inches in length, with a large and heavy head, which is often loaded with a quarter or half a pound of lead wrapped in cat gut, and securely fastened on, so that nothing but the greatest violence can separate it from the staff. The lash is ten feet long, made of small strips of buckskin, tanned so as to be dry and hard, and plaited carefully and closely together, of the thickness, in the largest part, of a man's little finger, but quite small at each extremity. At the farthest end of this throng is attached a cracker, nine inches in length, made of strong sewing silk, twisted and knotted, until it feels as firm as the hardest twine.

Such practices are accurately summarized in the description of American slavery by historian Jacqeline Jones who calls it "an economic and political system by which a group of whites extracted as much labor as possible from blacks (defined as the offspring of black or mulatto mothers) through the use or threat of force."

In 1959, psychologist Erik Erickson observed, "Students of history continue to ignore the simple fact that all individuals are born by mothers; that everybody was once a child; … and that society consists of individuals in the process of developing from children into parents." According to the 1850 census, almost half of all slaves during the final decade before Emancipation, were 14 years old or younger. They — like the slave youth before them — learned their most lasting and important lessons from a network of blood-related and fictive kin. They were taught wherever these black elders could eke out some autonomy. That place usually was in the slave quarters after they had completed the work of others. The culture, ideas, values, and worldview that they instilled ever-changing but grounded securely in a framework of African and American concepts.

Whether part of the majority that lived on plantations with 20 or more slaves or bound to farms where it was far harder to create their own space, both African-born and New World Africans grasped firmly the link between autonomy and freedom. No matter what the proximity of slaves was to those who claimed them, a black group consciousness convinced most to distance themselves as far away from the dominant population as possible. This conviction would never have taken root had the multitude of different African ethnic groups, many harboring ancient hostilities toward the other, not been able to coalesce as a single people. The process was complex and no one has offered more powerful or perceptive insights about it than historian Sterling Stuckey. He argues that through common threads of religion, art, music, and dance — all symbolized in the ring that a wide range of West and Central Africans would have gathered in Africa to perform various ceremonies — former ethnicities recreated themselves by simultaneously unraveling and re-weaving both old and new patterns.

What African captives retained and rejected from their homeland was shaped by its utility for them collectively. Those African words that the widest number of people would have recognized, for example, stood a far stronger chance of surviving than those least accessible. Parents kept memories of Africa alive, in part, by giving their children African day names. Because fathers were more likely to be separated from their wives and offspring through sale than mothers from their husbands and children, sons often were named after their fathers or grandfathers to remember those vital connections. Both parents confronted the harsh reality that one day they might not be there to guide their loved ones; this truth may explain why they so doggedly held on to African familial traditions and beliefs. As a result, they assured for all blacks a much wider spectrum of loving and caring bonds than what European and European-American ideas about kinship promised in their considerably less-extended nuclear families.

In the complicated syncretizing of African and North American realities, nothing was more important to black survival than the reconstruction of African concepts about gender. Despite the vastly different cultures found throughout the world's second-largest continent,

Mistress Chastising her Maid.
(Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress. Copy photography by Katherine Wetzel. Copyprint courtesy of The Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia.)

certain generalizations can be made about sub-Saharan African thinking concerning the nature of women and men and the roles that each sex should play. No matter from which ethnic group these Africans came, their beliefs about maleness and femaleness are broadly discernible. Men were responsible not only for any hunting that was done, but for the military protection of the entire community. African women helped to feed everyone through their extensive agricultural production and provided almost all the childcare, cleaning, cooking, and washing needs for the group as a whole.

Clearly in a society that brutally suppressed a critical component of these ancient traditions, failure to adapt would have been — and not infrequently was — fatal. Transported African women and men, however, opted to survive and to increase their numbers. Key insights about this survival can be found as early as on the transatlantic journeys known to many as the Middle Passage. Female captives usually were permitted more mobility than their male counterparts. Sometimes when allowed on deck, they took advantage of this liberty outside the ship's hold to acquire arms. Then, after distributing some of these arms to the men, they would join them in a joint insurrectionary effort to recapture their freedom. African concepts about the place of both men and women would never again be the same.

Just how dramatically the roles and expectations of New World Africans had changed is revealed in one of the most famous accounts of a confrontation between a slave and the man employed to break his spirit. Recorded by Frederick Douglass who became the most famous African-American abolitionist and 19th-century black leader, the account is rarely recited completely. When he was about 16 years old, Douglass fought a two-hour battle with Edward Covey, an older white male who "enjoyed the most unbounded reputation for being a first-rate overseer and negro-breaker." Douglass considered this particular struggle to be the "turning point" in his life. He wrote, "it rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense

Nat Turner's Rebellion. (Library of Congress)

of my own manhood." His fate could have been very different. During the fight, Covey ordered two slaves to restrain the young Douglass; both refused. One was a large and "powerful" woman named Caroline whom Douglass declared "could have mastered me easily, exhausted as I was." Because of her aid to Douglass, she received "several sharp blows" from Covey. While men sometimes intervened on behalf of women, so too did women for men: both knew that, while such assistance might be forthcoming, neither could depend on it.

It is striking that in the testimony of slaves, there is almost no criticism of or attack on black men who stood by without acting or failed to retaliate upon discovering that their mothers, sisters, aunts, wives, or lovers had been sexually violated or raped by white men. Similarly, there is very little evidence that the women who succumbed to sexual violence and then carried and bore the product of that violence, were ostracized by other slaves. Generations of black adults molded black girls and boys to believe and to pass on to their progeny a determination to do whatever they individually and collectively could to attack the institution of slavery and any thinking that suggested its permanency. By instilling this spirit of independence and confidence in each sex, they assured that the struggle against bondage would not be gendered. One slave mother conveyed these lessons in a way that her daughter never forgot. She warned: "I'll kill you, gal, if you don't stand up for yourself, . . . Fight, and if you can't fight, kick; if you can't kick, then bite."

Women progressed further in their thinking about gender than men. Despite the fact that they labored, fought, and suffered the identical consequences for any infractions as bondsmen, American-born black men — like their predecessors in Africa — continued to view women as responsible for childcare and most domestic tasks. This mindset was reinforced by male slaveholders whose own sense of women's place and duties coincided in certain ways with those of African men. By assigning slave women to do all the clothes-washing and housecleaning on their farms and plantations, they respected this one area of slave men's identity. That they and enslaved men considered it a punishment for bondsmen to engage in such activities reveals, again, just how much African and European male ideas merged on this level in regard to "women's work."

Although African and African-American men held fast to certain traditional beliefs about women, they radically changed others. Had they not done so, especially in redefining both masculinity and femininity, white enslavers, both male and female, would have been far

more successful in debasing blacks through sexual violence and racist propaganda. Much of the transformation that slaves experienced was through the black family. As one group of scholars has written, "From the beginning of African slavery in mainland North America, black people understood their society in the idiom of kinship." How best to preserve the family unit and the ideas shaping its distinctive character was one of the greatest challenges facing the enslaved. Unlike the white elite, who typically entered endogamous relations by marrying first cousins, slaves maintained a rigid exogamy. Black parents and adults passed these rules along and they were found among slave populations throughout North America. So too were strict rules about courting: boys seem to have been granted permission at an earlier age than girls. Young women adorned themselves with ribbons and perfumed their dresses with certain flowers; special songs from boys confirmed their interest. Evidence exists that young men would also demonstrate their seriousness as well as prove their manliness by defying the rules against unsanctioned absences by visiting sweethearts without the requisite "passes" from masters.

In light of slave rules against what they saw as incestuous bonds and the near impossibility of finding suitable mates on small farms with just one or two slaves, a good deal of afterhour and nightly travels — customarily done by the males rather than the females — was practically assured. Both sexes, however, ventured out to social affairs that were far more common than one might think. Fiddling, dancing, eating, and, not infrequently, drinking spirituous refreshments characterized many of these gay and festive gatherings. Devout Christians and Christian pretenders alike took advantage of religious meetings to commune with prospective mates. Wherever they met, however, permission to court usually had to be obtained first from the girl's parents.

While in most African societies, women did not have children prior to marriage, there were exceptions. Some ethnic groups in West Africa imposed no social sanctions against a young woman who had a child before uniting with a man who was not necessarily the father of her sole offspring. Remnants of each cultural norm were found among Africans and their descendants in North America. In traditional Africa, infertility could be grounds for connubial annulment. Albeit for largely different reasons, bondwomen paid as high a price, if not higher, for barrenness in the New World as they had in the Old.

The extraordinary respect and value of Africans for life survived the Middle Passage. Their great emphasis on family ties kept alive also a special adoration of motherhood. This combination inadvertently provided ammunition for enslavers to extract desired slave behavior by threatening to sell those who refused to comply. Slave masters and mistresses exploited brilliantly their power to destroy the only bonds that the enslaved collectively cherished. However "good" or "bad," slave women would have noted early the fate of sisters who failed to produce human profits quickly and regularly. Their commitment to the preservation of the black family surely inspired more than a few to bring life into bondage.

Whether for economic or punitive reasons, white enslavers and soul traders wreaked havoc on individual blacks and black families. Between 1810 and 1820, more than 130,000 slave chattels were driven across the Appalachian Mountains to work in the Southwest. On average, from 1820 to the Civil War, more than 200,000 slaves were forcefully removed each decade to newer fields of slavery primarily in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. As a consequence, it is estimated that one out of every three first marriages among Upper South slaves was aborted.

Decisions about entering into motherhood and fatherhood have always been wrought with certain challenges; these were simply more complex under slavery. The high mortality of slave babies — about twice that of whites — may have influenced slaves to have large families, weighing the chances of each child's survival. The pervasive threat of sexual violence and coercion may also have had an impact on prospective parents. What could await any black captive man or woman — single, married, or engaged — was given rare exposure in a 1937

interview. Working with the "Negro Writers' Unit" of the Federal Writers' Project in Florida, African-American Pearl Randolph spoke with two "pitifully infirm" ex-Virginia slaves.

Mr. and Mrs. Sam Everett, 86 and 90 respectively, met as slave children on the plantation of "Big Jim" McClain near Norfolk, Virginia. McClain, who owned more than 100 slaves, "mated indiscriminately" those whom be thought would produce "strong, healthy offspring"; no regard was given to their marital status. If any resisted, he made sure they stopped by making them fornicate in front of him. The same was demanded of slave couples whom McClain felt were "not producing children fast enough." Not only did McClain invite friends to watch and participate by allowing them to take and to have whatever chattels they desired, but he and his party sometimes "forced the unhappy husbands and lovers of their victims to look on."

The Everetts were not speaking from hearsay. Louisa Everett, whose childhood name was "Nor," confided,

> Marse Jim called me and Sam ter him and ordered Sam to pull off his shirt — that was all the McClain niggers wore — and he said to me: 'Nor, do you think you can stand this big nigger?' He had that old bull whip flung acrost his shoulder, and Lawd, that man could hit so hard! So I jes said 'yassur, I guess so,' and tried to hide my face so I couldn't see Sam's nakedness, but he made me look at him anyhow.
>
> "Well he told us what we must get busy and do in his presence, and we had to do it. After that we were considered man and wife. Me and Sam was a healthy pair and had fine, big babies, so I never had another man forced on me, thank God. Sam was kind to me and I learnt to love him.

When black women and men decided to have a child — whether in or out of wedlock — they were exercising a rare opportunity to choose in a world with few choices. That many women became mothers before entering into long-term relations or marriages with men who were not always the fathers, suggests community-wide approval. It is inconceivable that such a pattern could have evolved had black men collectively shunned women who had children by men other than themselves — black or white. Just as bondpeople of both sexes enforced rules of exogamy, slave men and women tried to abide as closely as they could to their traditions — both old and new — of courting, parenting, and sexuality.

From birth to death, a community of blood-related and biologically unrelated black adults guided slave youth. Through honorific titles such as "Uncle," "Aunt," "Mother," "Father," Sister," or "Cousin," slave children learned of a black world that enveloped far more than the confines legally prescribing them. If liberty was to be theirs, as each unfree generation insisted it would, unity among slave and free blacks was key. Tales of success and failure filtered through slave quarters; reports of black northerners and southerners who aided escapees by providing food and housing as well as individual and group betrayals that divulged fugitive routes hammered in a similar message of the urgent need for racial cooperation.

Besides preserving their history in voluminous oral texts, black elders perfected, taught, and promoted every stratagem that they believed would help their people to survive. Perhaps none was more effective than the broad mask of servility that they coached all to wear in order to disguise their quest for freedom. So effective were slave performances in satisfying the innermost desires of white audiences generally and slaveholding whites in particular that when thousands of ostensibly happy slaves vanished, only to reappear armed and unsmiling in U.S. military attire, southern whites suffered a collective shock. Few nightmares were as terrifying to whites as blacks in arms. Their final solution to this recurring horror was to take no black prisoners from among the Union troops. The 1864 Fort Pillow, Tennessee, massacre of 300 black soldiers after their surrender, proved the seriousness of Confederates about non-whites in rebellion.

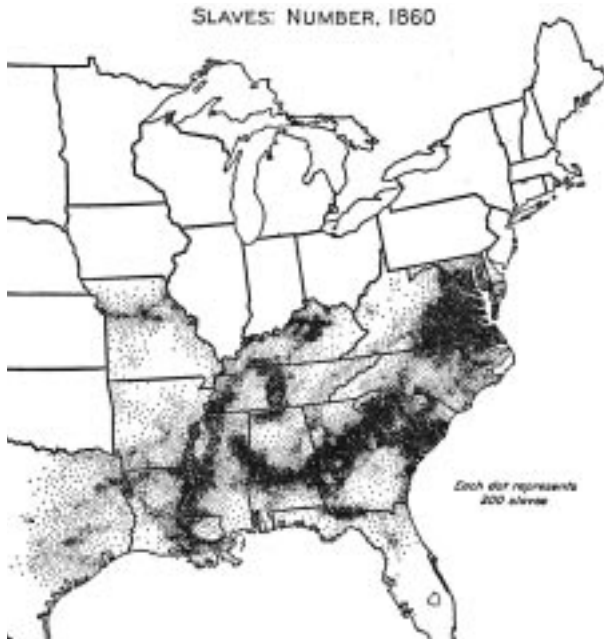
Despite the initial rejection of black soldiers by northern white government and civilian authorities, almost 200,000 African-American men, mostly southerners who had first freed themselves, eventually served in the Union forces. In this War of Secession, countless black women, working as spies, nurses, scouts, and cooks, sacrificed their labor and sometimes their lives. The valor and determination of both sexes were simply the culmination and congealing of behaviors established in a much older war. To them, the aim of each was the same: freedom. One among the liberated and, hence, victorious was Hawkins Wilson. What had helped him and millions of others to survive and to wage their seemingly endless battles before Emancipation, still exerted enormous power after 1865

In an 1867 letter that the recently married Texas freedman forwarded through a postbellum relief agency, Hawkins Wilson tried desperately to reconstruct a Caroline County, Virginia, family that white slaveowners and their agents had ravaged 24 years earlier. After providing a lengthy list of his "dearest relatives," where they had lived more than two decades past, and the names of their former owners, Hawkins enclosed this timeless inquiry:

> Dear Sister Jane, Your little brother Hawkins is trying to find out where you are and where his poor old mother is — Let me know and I will come to see you — I shall never forget the bag of biscuits you made for me the last night I spent with you — Your advice to me to meet you in Heaven has never passed from my mind and I have endeavored to live as near to my God, that if He saw fit not to suffer us to meet on earth, we might indeed meet in Heaven —… Please send me some of Julia's hair whom I left a baby in the cradle when I was torn away from you — I know that she is a young lady now, but I hope she will not deny her affectionate uncle this request,… Thank God that now we are not sold and torn away from each other as we used to be.

Like generations of boys and girls before him, Hawkins Wilson never stopped travelling down the road that black kinfolk had pounded from an ancient course. While detours were incessant and directions often lost, they never retreated from their mass ascent in search of freedom.

Map 4.1, *Geographical Distribution of Slave Population, 1790.*
(Reprinted with permission: E. Franklin Frazier, The Negro in the United States *[New York, 1966], p. 31, University of Chicago Press.)*



Map 4.2, *Geographical Distribution of Slave Population, 1860.*
(Reprinted with permission: E. Franklin Frazier, The Negro in the United States *[New York, 1966], p. 37, University of Chicago Press.)*

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Chapter Five

"Though We Are Not Slaves, We Are Not Free": Quasi-free Blacks in Antebellum America

William G. Shade

When the first "twenty Negars" were dragged by John Rolfe from a "dutch man of warre" onto the Virginia shore in 1619, they no doubt had been slaves, but under English law they were simply servants like the vast majority of 17th-century migrants to the colony. When it became economically more feasible to purchase Africans than white indentured servants, the colonists codified their law, at first limiting the behavior of the African Americans and then eventually creating a status, previously unknown to the Common Law, of chattel slave for life. Briefly there had been a handful of white slaves in Maryland — free born women who had married black slaves — but in time the new status became associated solely with African Americans. As a result, the world-view of British North Americans moved toward a bipolar racial optic in which people were seen as either black or white.

By the time of the American Revolution slavery was entrenched in all of the colonies of British North America and practically all of those of African ancestry were enslaved. In 1776 when Thomas Jefferson wrote that "all men are created equal" in justification of the rebellion of the thirteen colonies, free blacks numbered only a few thousand. Few of the revolutionaries were willing to face up to the contradiction between the existence of African American slavery and their rhetoric concerning the rights of man. Jefferson had included a condemnation of slavery and the slave trade in his draft Declaration, but the Continental Congress quickly removed it. The position of most of the revolutionary generation was one of ambivalence and, consequently, the patriots' attempts to include African Americans in their revolution were hesitant and the results mixed.

Upon taking command of the Continental Army, George Washington ordered recruiters to avoid "any stroller, negro, or vagabond, or person suspected of being an enemy to the liberty of America." Debates about accepting the services of African Americans were complicated by the decision of Lord Dunmore — the loyalist Governor of Virginia — to offer freedom to slaves who would sustain the cause of the Crown. Literally thousands of blacks fled to the English and freedom in the course of the war. Jefferson estimated 30,000 fugitives from Virginia alone. South Carolina's contemporary historian of the Revolution thought his state lost 25,000, while three-quarters of Georgia's slaves emancipated themselves when the opportunity presented itself. As the fortunes of war shifted in favor of the rebels, black recruits to the patriot cause mounted and eventually 5,000 African Americans — mostly from northern colonies — served the cause of independence as soldiers.

The participation of African Americans combined with the ideology of the Revolution to unleash a wave of public and private emancipation. Considering that before 1774 there had

been few signs of abolitionist sentiment anywhere in the colonies, the Revolution ushered in unprecedented change in the legal status of black Americans creating what Ira Berlin termed "the Free Negro Caste."

Within a quarter century all of the states north of the Mason-Dixon line had provided for the elimination of slavery and the Northwest Ordinance extended the prohibition on the "peculiar institution" west to the Mississippi in the area north of the Ohio River. Vermont's constitution of 1777 specifically banned slavery. While it was not until 1857 that New Hampshire actually outlawed slavery and declared blacks citizens, most whites took the position that the Declaration of Rights in the new state constitution had freed the handful of slaves in that state. Massachusetts was more direct. In the 1783 case of Quok Walker, the state supreme court declared that slavery violated the constitution of 1780. Pennsylvania's 1780 law that all blacks born after that year would be free when they reached adulthood became a model for other states. Connecticut and Rhode Island quickly followed suit passing similar acts, but it was not until 1799 and 1804 that gradual emancipation became a reality in New York and New Jersey.

Ninety percent of all African Americans, however, lived below the Mason-Dixon line. While there was some agitation to end slavery in the Upper South, the main effect of the Revolution was to encourage private manumission. As the northern states enacted gradual universal abolition, the southern states made it easier for masters to individually free their slaves and also moved against the traffic in slaves. The two fastest growing evangelical denominations, whose influence extended across the slave states and whose message attracted blacks as well as whites, spoke out. In 1784 the Methodists declared that slavery was "contrary to the golden laws of God." Five years later the Baptists came out against slavery as a violation of the rights of nature and "inconsistent with republican government."

Yet the new Constitution reflected the same ambiguity that haunted the Declaration of Independence. The portions of the Constitution referring to slavery were so carefully worded that they failed to directly confront the institution. The "three-fifths clause" in Article I, Section 3, that allowed southern states to claim representatives and presidential electors based on this odd formula, referred to slaves as "other persons." In Article IV, Section 2, the provision for the return of fugitive slaves, considered them along with other fugitives from the law and termed them persons "Held in Service or Labor." The third part of the Constitution that made direct reference to slaves was Article II, Section 9, that involved the international slave trade and the prohibition on congressional interference with this trade for 20 years — until 1807. In this clause slaves were called "Persons as any state shall think proper to admit." These provisions, however, when combined with the comity clause, a willingness to accept the "due rights of the states," and the extra-territorial reach of state laws on property made it possible for the "peculiar institution" not only to exist, but also to prosper.

Because the largest slaveholding states in the North introduced gradual emancipation that freed only those born after a certain date when they reached adulthood, the "free" North contained a sizable number of slaves well into the 19th century. While three quarters of the northern blacks were free by 1810, there were still 20,000 slaves north of the Mason Dixon line. Slavery was disappearing from the border state of Delaware at about the same rate through private manumission. By 1840 nearly two-thirds of the African Americans living in the District of Columbia were free while there were still over 1,000 slaves in the North.

Gradual emancipation, private manumission, and flight boosted the number of free blacks in the border states and the North. After revolution broke out on San Domingue, free mulatto refugees fled to the southern cities of Charleston, Savannah, and New Orleans. Between the end of the American Revolution and the War of 1812, the quasi-free black population grew at a staggering rate. From 1790 to 1810 it increased by over 300 percent; one in every seven African Americans was legally free. In the Upper South the number tripled and

10 percent of the black population was free. In the Lower South the only sizable concentrations of free blacks were in the Atlantic port cities and along the Gulf Coast. When Louisiana became a state in 1812, 18 percent of its black population was free.

The proportion of free blacks in the African-American population of both the North and Upper South grew during the antebellum years, but in the Lower South, where it was at its height in 1810, it declined. By 1850 there were approximately the same number of free blacks in the United States as there had been slaves at the time of the Revolution. A majority of these African Americans lived in the South and 85 percent of those lived in the Upper South.

The status and character of the free black population differed greatly by region. Northern blacks were freed indiscriminately as a group and reflected the conditions of slavery in the region. They tended to be fairly dark skinned, relatively urban, and generally unskilled. While the free blacks of the Lower South were similarly urban, they included a much larger number of mulattoes. In the North less than one third of the free African-American population was of mixed ancestry, but in the Lower South three quarters were. These "people of color" set themselves apart from the mass of African-American slaves in the region, calling themselves "creoles" or "gens de coulour." This elite that was the product of selective manumission of planters' own descendants included a few families that were exceedingly wealthy, well educated, and sometimes substantial slaveholders.

Most free blacks in the South were less concentrated in urban areas than were either those in the Lower South or those in the North. Seventy two percent of all free blacks in the South lived in Virginia, Maryland and Delaware and most of these lived in rural areas. Although everywhere free blacks were more likely than slaves to be of mixed ancestry, those in the Upper South included a larger proportion of mulattoes than did the free blacks of the North, but they were as a group darker skinned than those further south.

In the antebellum period the economic condition and legal status of free blacks deteriorated everywhere. The slave states grew more restrictive, limiting private manumission, encouraging colonization, and circumscribing the day to day lives of free blacks with a system of curfews and passes. In Georgia, Florida, and Alabama the legislatures even mandated white guardianship. Migration was prohibited or limited, as was public assembly and black preaching. Vagrancy laws weighed on those in the South who could be sold into servitude. Laws also limited ownership of dogs and guns — the symbols of white southern manhood and independence. The extension of suffrage to all white adult males was accompanied by the disfranchisement of blacks not only in the Upper South, where a few had voted, but also in the North. By 1840 when a huge proportion of whites turned out for the presidential election, only 8 percent of the free blacks lived in states in which they could vote.

Despite the passage of the Northwest Ordinance, there were some slaves in the Old Northwest, and free African Americans in the region lived under restrictive Black Codes modeled on the laws of the southern states. Only in Illinois was there a serious movement to introduce slavery after statehood, but the mid-western states never allowed blacks to vote and denied African Americans most of the legal rights of citizens. They also had constitutional prohibitions against black immigration although by 1840 nearly one-fifth of the northern free black population lived in the new western states. Most had fled from the South and a majority were light skinned. By the time of the Civil War there were almost as many free blacks in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois as in Virginia.

Prejudice led to anti-black violence throughout the North. The most famous "race riot" — the euphemism for white attacks on free blacks and their property — occurred in Cincinnati in 1829, but there were others elsewhere — in Philadelphia, New York, Pittsburgh, and then again in Cincinnati in 1841. A few cases, such as that in Providence in 1831, produced retaliatory violence from the blacks, but the almost festive spirit of racist white mobs was caught by the Philadelphia rioter who explained that he and his friends were just out "hunting the nigs."

The general climate of prejudice created a pattern de facto as well as de jure segregation that separated the races socially. Intermarriage was generally barred. Schools were segregated, but so too were theaters, hotels, restaurants, hospitals, and cemeteries. Streetcars, stages, railroads and steamboats developed a pattern of segregated accommodations that were separate and distinctly not equal. Residential segregation and something resembling modern urban ghettos were rather slow to develop in the "walking city." W. E. B. Du Bois showed in his classic study of Philadelphia that blacks often lived on the cross streets and alleyways, between streets lined with single-family homes, often those of prosperous whites. As the economic situation of free blacks deteriorated, however, areas with names like "Nigger Hill" and "New Guinea" appeared and housing segregation began to force respectable blacks into undesirable areas often associated with crime, prostitution, gambling, alcohol and drugs.

As with other aspects of free black life, education defies generalization and illustrates the ambiguous and conflicted position of these quasi-free people. In the 18th century Protestant groups promoted education to enable the masses to read the Bible. White groups such as the New York Manumission Society opened African schools in the 18th century. In Newport, Boston, Philadelphia and New York City schools educated various classes of black children. The struggle for education was made arduous by white prejudice that deprived blacks of public support in these efforts or segregated and degraded them. Although some African Americans were admitted to public schools before 1820, generally they were assigned to separate and unequal institutions even in New England. New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio provided (segregated) education, but even that was denied in most mid-western states until the 1850s.

In the South, wealthy urban mulattoes established their own schools and in New Orleans the Catholic Church provided for the education of some black children, but generally throughout the region the quasi-free blacks were barred from those schools that existed. Baltimore and Washington stood out as exceptions in which a few black schools connected to churches were established. African-American education relied primarily on private sources and consequently reflected the differences between the Upper South and Lower South. Nearly all the free blacks of Charleston and Mobile were literate as were three-fourths of those in New Orleans and Savannah. In the Upper South, however, literacy was less prevalent; in Richmond, for instance, two-thirds of the free blacks could not read or write.

The situation in the North was worse than that in Charleston and Mobile, but better than in the remainder of the southern cities. The census of 1850 reveals that four-fifths of the urban free black adults were literate. In Boston that figure reached 90 percent and in Providence, 96 percent. Yet the example of Boston reveals the ambiguous nature of the achievement. After a good deal of organized effort to gain access to the white public school system of Massachusetts, blacks were successful in most of the smaller towns but still shut out in Boston. In 1849 Benjamin Roberts brought suit to have his daughter admitted to the nearest school. The state supreme court ruled that separate but equal facilities did not violate the Commonwealth's constitution. Fortunately, the reform-minded, anti-Catholic "Know-Nothing" party dominated the legislature and passed a bill in 1855 prohibiting segregation.

Illiteracy and racial prejudice combined to restrict economic opportunity for free blacks, but the different nature of the free African-American communities in the Lower South, the Upper South, meant that the caste endured a variety of economic conditions. In Charleston three-fourths of the free blacks were in skilled trades — carpenters, tailors, millwrights, and barbers. Much the same was true in New Orleans where the 1850 census reported one architect, four doctors, and 64 merchants; in all 165 men — that is 9 percent of the city's free black population — engaged in "pursuits which may be considered as requiring an education." The most frequently listed occupation was "artisan," a category including 355 carpenters and 278 masons. Only 10 percent were listed as laborers. In rural Louisiana there were 158 farmers and 244 planters, nearly all of whom were mulattoes.

The situation in the Upper South was quite different. The proportion of skilled and unskilled in Richmond was inverse to that in Charleston. Also, because Richmond was much more deeply involved in manufacturing, half of the black men worked in the factories, mills, and foundries. One third had skilled jobs and the remainder were marginal laborers plagued by irregular employment. Two-thirds of those in the Upper South lived in rural areas. In North Carolina 75 percent were farmers or farm laborers and the others worked in tanneries, in turpentine stills, or as wood cutters. These were the poorest of the free blacks and some were living in situations with long term indentures.

The situation in the Lower South deteriorated in the final decade before the Civil War. While the light-skinned elite continued to do fairly well, the blacks were being forced closer to slavery. Almost everywhere in the cities of the South, free blacks faced increasing competition from the wave of Irish and German immigrants entering the country in the 1840s and 1850s. As many more immigrants entered the northern cities, this pressure was more acutely felt by free blacks there. A detailed study of Philadelphia has charted the sharp deterioration of the economic conditions of free blacks in that city, especially after 1840 as the Irish took over jobs traditionally considered suitable only for blacks workers.

Northern free blacks were even more concentrated in urban areas than were those of the Lower South. Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and Cincinnati all had large free black populations. But, because of the large number of middle sized towns in the North, only one third of New York state's free blacks lived in New York City and Brooklyn, and only one fifth of those in Pennsylvania lived in Philadelphia. In northern cities between two-thirds and four-fifths of the free black males were unskilled.

The general employment situation of free blacks in the North can be seen in the comparison put forward in the 1850 census, between Louisiana and New Orleans on the one hand and Connecticut and New York City on the other. In Connecticut 7 percent were farmers; most free blacks lived in towns. Over half of all employed men were laborers. Barbers, shoemakers, and other artisans made up only 7 percent of the employed male free blacks. The largest single profession was seamen who accounted for 16 percent of the workers. The census counted "only twenty individuals in occupations requiring education" comparing the situation unfavorably to that in Louisiana.

The census also compared New York City unfavorably to New Orleans — a double-dipping of bureaucratic racism. Only one -fifth of New York's employed free blacks were mulattoes and "sixty were clerks, doctors, druggists, lawyers, merchants, ministers, printers, students or teachers" — 2 percent of those employed. In fact, New York had 21 ministers and New Orleans one, nine doctors and New Orleans only four. New York had four printers and four lawyers, and New Orleans had none of either profession. New Orleans had twelve teachers and New York only eight. The real difference was in clerks and merchants, who together provide 125 of New Orleans' 165 educated professionals, and almost all of whom were mulattoes dependent entirely on the patronage of whites. In New York about one-third of the free black men were day laborers and an equal proportion were domestics — coachmen, servants, and butlers. Thirteen percent of the African-American men employed in New York City in 1850 were seamen, but only 12.5 percent were in skilled trades. In this proportion of skilled laborers, New York was typical of northern cities where free blacks were less likely to have skills than in Charleston and New Orleans.

Free blacks tended to be predominately female, a demographic condition which affected the economic role of women and their position in the family throughout the country. Although it may take many forms, the family was the basic institution of the free black communities, providing the economic, psychological, and social support necessary for community's survival. Its strengths and weaknesses reflected the strengths and weaknesses of the free African-American communities and its distinctive structure reflected the conditions of these communities.

The mulatto elite of the Lower South was the product of miscegenation primarily between white men and female slaves and the subsequent manumission of the children and sometimes of the mothers themselves. As a consequence the group tended to have skills, education, and white patronage enabling them to replicate the cultural mores of the whites and create a degree of marital stability. Family became a crucial defining element of this elite and marital alliances between prominent families helped sustain their privileged economic position.

While this group followed the white middle class model and rural free black families resembled in their structure those of the poor whites, in the southern cities, including New Orleans and Charleston, where women made up nearly three-fifths of the free black population, there were a disproportionate number of female-headed households and a high proportion of free black women worked outside the home as maids, cooks, washerwomen, and peddlers. In the countryside, free black women worked in similar capacities for local whites and sometimes labored in the fields as well.

The situation for free black families in the North resembled that in southern cities. There were a large number of single adult women in these communities and a relatively large number of female-headed households — in Philadelphia and Boston slightly over a fifth of all households. Paradoxically the private role of free black women resembled that of whites of similar economic condition in that they were essential to the family economy, while their public role was more pervasive than that of all but a small segment of white middle class women. A detailed study of free black family in Boston has shown that their importance in "the family economy facilitated an expansion of their social and political influence in community affairs."

In Boston one found a variety of family situations among free blacks. The majority lived in black households either as members of a nuclear family or as boarders. The average African-American household in Boston in 1850 contained a married couple and two children; three-quarters of the city's black children lived in two-parent households. Since white institutions refused to accept them, homeless African-American children had to depend upon the kindness of strangers and consequently 9 percent of Boston's black children lived with people who probably were not their biological parents. Many were kin or church members and in general the Boston situation was better than that in cities like Providence where such children were often bound out as servants to white families.

There were almost twice as many single adult females as there were single adult males and fewer than half of Boston's adult African-American women were married. Free blacks married generally in their twenties with the grooms being usually two years older than the brides. As the age of the groom rose, however, the differential increased so that if a free black woman reached her thirties without marrying she probably never would. Marriage was also affected by skin color. Basically blacks married blacks and mulattoes married mulattoes, but in mixed marriages men were generally the darker partner. In those involving whites only two white men were married to black women, but eleven white women were married to black men.

Married free black women generally held two "jobs," working as domestics outside the home while running their own households. A large number of African-American women took in boarders. In 1850 one third of Boston's black households contained boarders and as economic conditions deteriorated during the 1850s the proportion grew to 40 percent as more free blacks were forced to move in with kin. The "hidden depression" of the 1850s hit the blacks particularly hard and it had destructive effects on the African-American family. Not only were more people forced to move in with relatives, but the proportion of black children living in two-parent households declined and the number of women working outside the home soared. In Boston "well over half of the married women and perhaps as many as three quarters of the unmarried women and teenage girls were gainfully employed."

A large number of single black men lived in boarding houses clustered in a neighborhood separate from "the hill" where the more respectable married families lived. For these

young men — many of whom were seamen — their boarding houses functioned as social organizations of an often rough sort, supporting their drinking and small time gambling and casual sex. The connection between these black neighborhoods remained and men, who in their teens and early twenties were fancy dressers, womanizers, gamblers, and drinkers, often "got married, got religion and moved to the hill."

In 1849 Martin R. Delaney wrote Frederick Douglass, "As among our people generally the Church is the Alpha and Omega of all things." African Americans underwent a "spiritual holocaust" in the process of enslavement, but since the late 18th century, they have been characterized by their commitment to their churches. Essentially the congregation provided day to day support of both a spiritual and material nature to their believers and functioned as the hub of small communities providing a context for their social life as well. The black ministers were both spiritual advisors and community leaders, condemning segregation and slavery, but also warning against the usual variety of personal sins.

Even though white Baptists and Methodists proselytized among the slaves and free blacks and gained thousands of converts, separate black churches quickly appeared. In Philadelphia Richard Allen and Absolom Jones took the first step towards creating a national African-American sect when they were expelled from St. Georges Methodist Church that they had attended and where Allen had even preached. Personal and theological differences between them led Jones and his followers to establish St. Thomas African Episcopal Church that retained its relation to the white parent body and Allen to found the independent Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church.

In 1816 representatives of the various African Methodist churches that had grown up in the region met in Philadelphia to form a national AME body, choosing Allen as its first Bishop. At the beginning of the 19th century black Baptist churches appeared in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia and other northern cities. Reverend Thomas Paul, who first organized a black church in Boston, became famous as the pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York. There were also separate black Presbyterian and Episcopal congregations in the North although they generally retained some affiliation with the parent bodies.

In the South Morris Brown led an AME congregation in Charleston South Carolina, but he was driven from the city in the wake of the Denmark Vesey slave conspiracy of 1822. In Virginia black Baptist churches grew up in Richmond, Norfolk, and Petersburg, but eventually these were undermined by the repressive laws passed in response to the Nat Turner revolt in 1831. Not only in Virginia, but also in North Carolina, Alabama, and Georgia, tight restrictions were imposed on independent black congregations. Only in parts of the Upper South did African-American Baptist churches survive white persecution.

Aside from the churches, the free black communities contained benevolent societies and fraternal organizations that helped sustain the quality of African-American life. Mutual benefit societies originated to provide a decent burial of members and to collectively respond to natural disasters that could ruin an individual artisan, but their scope extended to helping fellow blacks improve their position in life by encouraging thrift, hard work, a moral life, and self respect. Jones and Allen's Free African Society formed in 1787 was both spiritual and social in its purpose, establishing a cemetery, supporting informal education, and finding apprenticeships for orphans. By the 1830s such self-culture collectives had spread across the North and in Philadelphia there were over one hundred such groups. The Philadelphia Library Company for Colored Persons provided a reading room and supported lyceum lectures. The Phoenix Society in New York City similarly supported a library, a school, and lectures on subjects ranging from literature to the mechanic arts.

Of a more social nature were the African-American secret societies, the most famous of which was the Masons founded by Prince Hall in 1787. A part-time Methodist Preacher and

leader of the Free African Society of Boston, Hall had been a Mason since before the Revolution. Eventually lodges were established in Providence, Baltimore, Washington, even Louisville and New Orleans. The degree to which these groups, the mutual aid societies and the churches, formed an interlocking directorate within the free black community can be seen in the fact that Philadelphia's black Masons were organized by Rev. Jones, Bishop Allen, and the abolitionist businessman, James Fortin.

The churches and benevolent societies of the northern free black communities provided the basis for the various political movements of the antebellum era. These activities involved strategies rooted in a spectrum from complete biological and cultural assimilation through cultural pluralism and communal action to separatism and black nationalism. Generally these seemingly separate racial ideologies were woven together and the emphasis depended upon the context. All elements of the spectrum emphasized both race pride and the Puritan ethic of thrift, industry and economic accumulation. Much of the debate among African Americans concerned how, as W. E. B. Du Bois would later write, "to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spat upon by his fellows, without having doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face."

From the end of the 18th century, some African Americans advocated the return of American blacks to an African homeland. The Free African Society of Newport made such a proposal in 1789, but the first attempt to implement the idea grew out of the activities of Paul Cuffe, a New England shipowner who carried 38 American blacks to Sierra Leone in 1815. Whites, primarily from the Upper South, joined the following year to establish the American Colonization Society (ACS), that encouraged the establishment of Liberia in West Africa to which the organization transported 4,000 free blacks over the next two decades. From its founding, most free blacks were hostile to the organization's goal of deportation. When in 1828 Samuel Cornish and John Russrum founded the nation's first African-American newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, one of their main targets was the colonization movement. As a result of their efforts blacks were influential in moving white abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison to turn against colonization and toward immediatism.

Before Garrison spoke out, however, a Boston secondhand clothing dealer, whose father was a slave in North Carolina, produced one of the most militant and widely circulated calls for abolition. David Walker's *Appeal… to the Coloured Citizens of the World*… denounced colonization and called upon slaves to rise up in rebellion and cast off their "infernal chains."

Walker had been an agent for *Freedom's Journal* and its editor Cornish had proposed calling a national African-American convention. These conventions that met yearly throughout the antebellum era essentially formed a national organization advocating for free blacks those interests that appeared at the time. The first such convention met in Philadelphia in 1830 to establish the American Society of Free Persons of Colour under the leadership of Bishop Allen. In the 1830s the convention movement provided the focus for reform activity, emphasizing moral uplift — temperance, education, hard work, and home ownership. The conventions appealed to black churches, petitioned Congress, and urged African Americans to learn trades and create a sense of individual and group self-respect. Essentially their main goal was assimilation and they denounced colonization. Most of these black leaders were also involved in the movement to abolish slavery.

When the American Anti-Slavery Society (AAS) was organized in Philadelphia in December 1833, James Babadoes of Boston, Fortin's son-in-law Robert Purvis, and James McCrummull a Philadelphia dentist signed the declaration of sentiments which Garrison had written in McCrummell's home. Eventually they and four other African Americans including New York Episcopal minister Peter Williams were appointed to the Board of Managers. In 1839-40 when the abolition movement split and the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society was formed most black leaders aligned with the new group while a small group of loyal

Garissonians in Boston and Philadelphia remained in the AAS whose reform interests remained eclectic.

The majority of white abolitionists in America were women, and black women also played a major role in the movement. The Female Anti-Slavery Society of Salem, Massachusetts, was founded in 1832 by African-American women who had participated in the Boston Female Antislavery Society and in the Philadelphia Female Antislavery Society. When the First Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women was held in 1837, African Americans Susan Paul and Sarah M. Douglas were chosen as officers.

In addition to filling key leadership positions, blacks served the abolition movement in a variety of ways. Most important was the publication of slave narratives written by fugitives who had escaped the peculiar institution. Frederick Douglas who penned the most famous narrative also became one of the best known black abolitionist lecturers and the leading black editor of his day. But Douglass was not alone. Free black men and women published narratives, lectured, and edited newspapers such as the *Mirror of Liberty*, the *Weekly Advocate* and the *Colored American* in the cause of abolition. These papers, like the convention movement, included a broad agenda informing free blacks about matters concerning American Americans throughout the country, fighting discrimination, and encouraging moral uplift.

Free blacks took an immediate role in combating the "peculiar institution" through their work in what was popularly known as the "underground railroad." Actually this was an informal network of black resistance that aided fugitive slaves and was never organized as systematically as the post-Civil War myth decreed. Individuals like Harriet Tubman made many forays into the South to lead small bands of slaves to freedom. Vigilance committees were organized in the major cities to collect money and clothes for fugitives and, most importantly, to provide shelter. Eventually in the 1850s following the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 these vigilance committees were involved in the cases of Shadrack, Anthony Burns, and others — men considered to be fugitives — cases that served to heighten tension between the North and the South.

In the 1840s the convention movement brought to the fore a new militant generation of leaders who shifted toward more direct political action. Men like Douglas and Henry Highland Garnet were critical of white reformers and willing to emphasize black independent action. The free black convention at Hartford in 1840 focused on the problem of the political impotence of African Americans. Putting on a national agenda efforts that had started at the local level and were symbolized by the *Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens* (1838) opposing disenfranchisement in Pennsylvania, they launched a campaign to reduce the New York restrictions on black voters.

Reverend Garnet startled the 1843 convention with his "Address to the Slaves" calling upon them to rise against their masters: "You had better all die — die immediately, than live slaves and entail wretchedness upon your posterity." After a long debate between Garnet and Douglass, it was rejected as part of the convention record by a single vote. Four years later in Troy, New York, when Garnet again delivered the same message, it was accepted by the convention.

Aside from this growing militancy, the conventions talked increasingly of racial solidarity and collective support for economic advancement. They debated the value of segregated education and the necessity of independent institutions. The convention in 1853 pushed the idea of separate black institutions to serve black needs, but also to make blacks more effective members of American society. This position placed a greater emphasis on racial solidarity, the support of black businesses, and race pride. The convention advocated not only manual labor schools for blacks, but also a national African-American museum and library.

Others, however, carried separatism and black nationalism further. Following the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 between 3,000 and 5,000 blacks fled the United States to Canada. One of them was the physician Martin R. Delaney, who had denounced the ACS as

"arrant hypocrites" and proclaimed that blacks were "Americans having a birthright citizenship." But by the end of the 1850s, he turned against assimilation and traveled to the Niger Valley in Africa, perhaps to prepare the way for a mass exodus.

On the eve of the Civil War, most black leaders were disillusioned and at least considered the idea of colonization. Even Douglass, who had emerged as the foremost spokesman of African Americans and who had consistently insisted upon integration was discouraged by the Republicans' stand on slavery. However, once the war commenced he and most of the leaders of the free black community rallied to the cause of the Union. Dulaney became an officer in the Union army. Eventually nearly 200,000 African Americans would fight for freedom in the Civil War.

The antebellum experience of quasi-free African Americans cautions against the easy analogy incorporated in the idea that today's urban blacks are simply "the last of the immigrants." Actually their arrival in British North America predates that of those usually termed immigrants by a century and their experience with slavery was shared by no other group. Those who were free during the era of slavery were primarily an urban population in a predominantly rural nation. Like the classic European immigrants of the 19th century, African Americans faced prejudice and social stigma, but beyond that, in ways that no European ethnic or religious group were forced to endure, African Americans were deprived of their rights as citizens and subjected to legally enforced discrimination and segregation in nearly all walks of life. As Alexis de Tocqueville wrote in *Democracy in America:*

> When the Negro dies, his bones are cast aside, and the distinction of conditions prevail even in the equality of death. Thus the Negro is free, but he can share neither the rights nor the pleasures, not the labor, nor the afflictions, nor the tomb of him whose equal he has been declared to be; and he cannot meet him upon fair terms in life or in death.

During the three decades before the Civil War as waves of Irish and German immigrants swept across the Atlantic, the Jim Crow system of segregation in the North and the Black Codes that governed free blacks in the South, became increasingly restrictive. When emancipated, the African-American population possessed far fewer skills, a lower level of education, and much less capital than those immigrants upon arrival. Because of prejudice and legal restrictions — restrictions supported by the new immigrants who often found that adopting the racial ideology that justified such discrimination represented an essential aspect of their own successful assimilation. Even those African Americans who had skills found themselves unable to employ them.

Faced with racist prejudice, legal discrimination and the competition from the European immigrants for the least attractive and most menial jobs, the economic situation of African Americans deteriorated badly. The proportion of free blacks holding skilled jobs — always low outside the elite mulatto communities of the Lower South — declined. This economic crisis weakened the free black family and further strained the meager resources of black churches, beneficial societies, and social protest organizations. In 1857 on the eve of the Civil War, a prescient Scottish visitor wrote, "We see, in effect, two nations — one white and another black — growing up together within the same political circle, but never mingling on a principle of equality," an eerie anticipation of the 1968 Kerner Commission report on urban violence.

Table 5.1

African-American Population of the United States, 1790-1860

	1790	1800	1810	1820
North				
Free	27,109	47,154	78,181	99,281
Slave	40,370	35,946	27,500	19,108
South				
Free	32,357	61,241	108,265	134,223
Slave	657,527	857,095	1,163,854	1,519,017
Total	757,208	1,002,237	1,377,808	1,771,656
Percent of US Population	19.3	18.9	19.0	18.4

	1830	1840	1850	1860
North				
Free	137,529	170,728	196,262	226,152
Slave	3,568	1,129	262	64
South				
Free	182,070	215,575	238,187	261,818
Slave	2,005,475	2,486,362	3,204,051	3,953,696
Total	2,328,642	2,873,794	3,638,762	4,441,730
Percent of US Population	18.1	16.8	15.7	14.1

From: **The Negro Population in the United States, 1790-1915** *(Washington, D.C., 1918), p. 57.*

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